PlayStation 3 · PlayStation Portable · PlayStation Network · PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

MARCH 2010

The Official Magazine

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 30 (March 2010)

THE NEW ESSENTIALS

→ BioShock 2
→ Heavy Rain
First reviews inside!

PSPgo
49 reasons you need one right now!

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

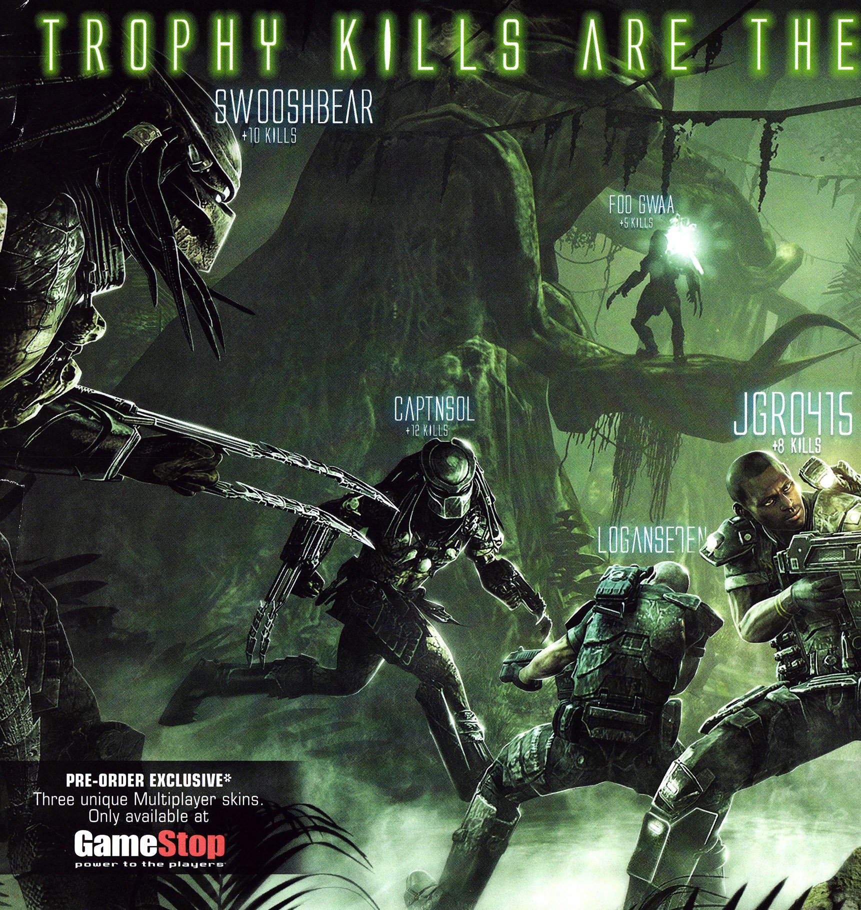
CRYSIS 2

Aliens invading NYC? No problem!
Blast their faces off with the Nanosuit 2.0

Konichiwa, gangsta!
Yakuza 3: Japan's answer to GTA?

Red Dead Redemption
Resonance of Fate ▪ Brink
Dante's Inferno ▪ Dead Space 2
True Crime ▪ Final Fantasy XIII

Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION



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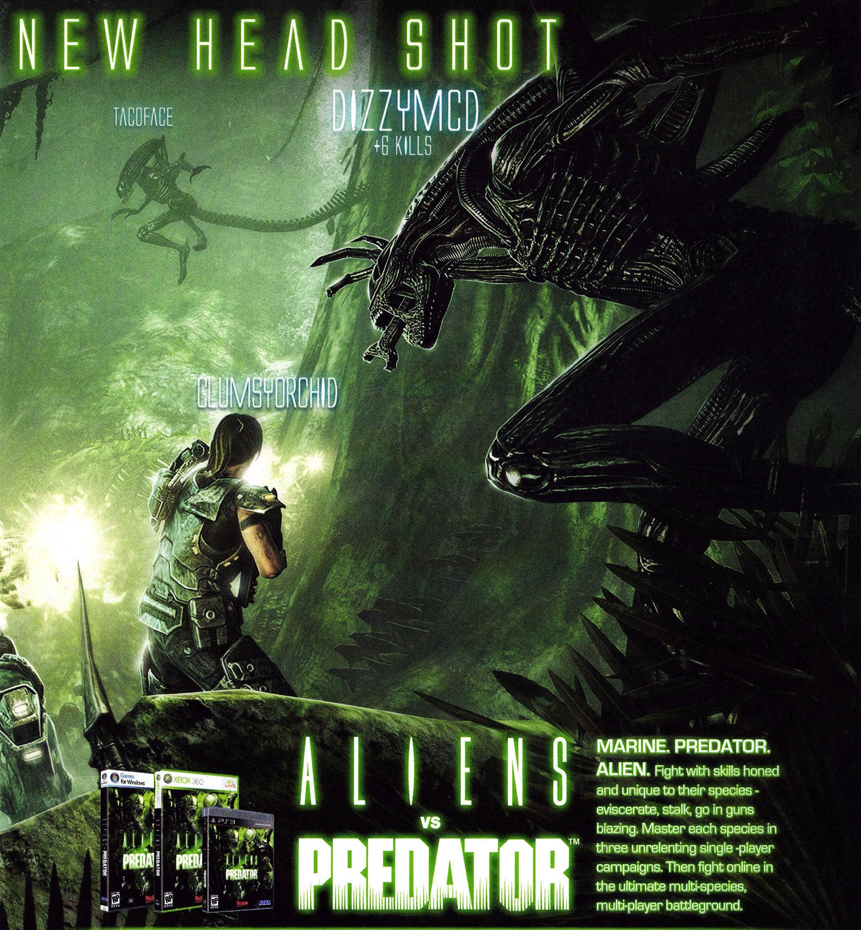
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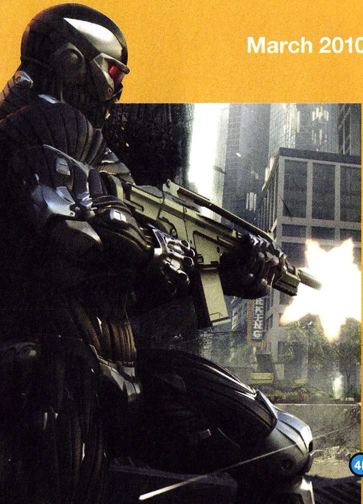

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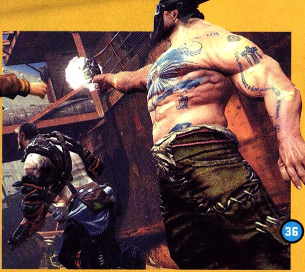

Looks that Kill

Yes, it's a PC franchise. But when it's widely regarded as one of the greatest shooters to ever grace the big gray box, it matters.

But that's not the only reason I put *Crysis 2* on the cover. A few months back, an old friend at EA snuck in to PTOM towers and showed me top-secret footage of the game in action. It was stunning—better looking than almost anything I've seen on PS3. And here's the best part: All the glorious wreckage, the metropolitan carnage, the dynamic lighting and real-time destruction, was generated *not* on a PC, nor an Xbox, but a PS3.

Yep, this baby is being built to take advantage of the massive power the PS3 offers—which is nothing to scoff at, considering Crytek's original *Crysis* was almost unplayable on anything but the highest-end PCs when it was released.

Five minutes after my pal left, I began the push to be the first magazine to reveal *Crysis 2's* true glory. And now here we are. But don't just take my word for it. Turn to page 40 and prepare to be dazzled.

Crysis 2 might be the new hotness, but PTOM's also got you covered with reviews of two of the young year's biggest releases—both essential games that you simply must play. *Heavy Rain* delivers on its promise of (literally) changing the game, and *BioShock 2* somehow manages to improve on the original. Amazing.

And if you haven't yet bought a PSPgo, you won't want to miss our guide to everything that's awesome about the diminutive powerhouse.

So put in an application for a second job, or start saving your allowance, or dip into that trust fund. Because if you're like me, you're gonna find something on almost every page that you'll want to rush out to buy.

And to think, this year is only just beginning...

GARY

Gary Steinman | Editor in Chief
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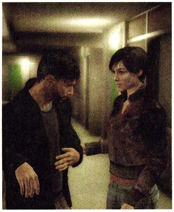

The Team

GARY STEINMAN
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Our wizened word warrior was nearly destroyed by his full-on immersion into the darkest corners of PlayStation gaming. Yet Gary has emerged unscathed, ready to return to Rapture, thirsty for more *Heavy Rain.*

NOW PLAYING: *BioShock 2, Heavy Rain, Final Fantasy XIII*

ROGER BURCHILL
MANAGING EDITOR

Sure, Roger's been savoring some of the most succulent PS3 gaming fruits of the season in *Uncharted 2* and *Bayonetta,* but he also finally finished playing *Mini Ninjas.* Now that's hardcore.

NOW PLAYING: *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves, Bayonetta, Mini Ninjas*

KEN BOUSQUET
ART DIRECTOR

"I've been spending a lot of time working on free kicks. Other than that, I don't know." Words to live by? We have no idea, but Ken once again scored a winning goal with this month's undeniably gorgeous issue.

NOW PLAYING: *Pro Evolution Soccer 2010, FIFA 10*

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Scott was initially slated to write this month's *BioShock 2* review, but the fates (read: Gary) conspired to deny him. Actually, he's thrilled as he's now free to enjoy his Rapture unadulterated by editorial responsibilties.

NOW PLAYING: *R.U.S.E., BioShock 2, Modern Warfare 2*

DAVID MURPHY
INTERN WITH THE MOSTEST

David's quite thankful for his new internship; it keeps his mind off his growing backlog of unplayed videogames. But he refuses to play *Uncharted 2* in SD, and his new HDTV accidently got shipped to Yemen.

NOW PLAYING: *Persona 4, Armored Core: For Answer*

EVAN SHAMOON
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Years after a short-lived career on Japanese television as "the hairy guy," Evan returned to the the seedy streets of Shinjuku for this issue's *Yakuza 3* feature. He reports all his pinky fingers are still intact.

NOW PLAYING: *Yakuza 3, Resonance of Fate*

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Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR).

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CUSTOMER SERVICE: PlayStation: The Official Magazine Customer Care, PO Box 5154, Harlan, IA 51593-0654. Phone: 1-800-477-0484. Web: www.playstationthemagazine.com/customerservice. Email: playstation@cdsfulfillment.com. Back issues can be purchased by calling 1-800-865-7240. REPRINTS: Reprint Management Service. Phone: 717-399-1900 x.100.

ISSN: 1941-5303

PlayStation: The Official Magazine is published 13 times a year, monthly plus Holiday issue following December issue. Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Phone: (650) 872-1642. Fax (650) 872-2207. Website: www.futureus.com. Periodicals postage paid in South San Francisco, CA and at additional mailing offices. Newsstand distribution is handled by Time Warner Retail. Subscriptions: One year basic rate (13 issues): $20.00 U.S., $34.00 Canada. Canadian price includes postage and GST (GST #128220688). $44.00 Foreign. Prepaid in US funds only. Subscriptions do not include newsstand-only specials. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to PlayStation: The Official Magazine, P.O. Box 5154, Harlan, IA 51593-0654. PMA #40612608. Produced in the U.S.A. Ride-along Enclosure: None. Standard Mail enclosure: None. Returns: Bleuchip International, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2, Canada. Future US publishes Guitar World, Mac | Life, Maximum PC, Nintendo Power, Pregnancy, Revolver, Windows: The Official Magazine, The Official Xbox Magazine, and others.

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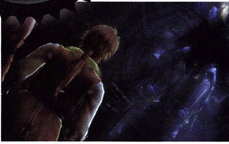

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The (bottom)line must be drawn—*here!*
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↙ KICK, PUNCH, SHOOT, BASH
"By integrating close combat and gunplay with free-running, the player isn't stuck in a 'mode' at any point in the game," explains lead designer Mike Skupa. "The ability to rapidly move from melee attacks to shooting really opens up the sandbox nature of the game, where any number of elements can come into play." Fights happen anywhere in the world, and the environmental interactivity still applies: walls, tables, air conditioners, dumpsters, cars, and human beings will all provide their own unique combat opportunities (file under: things to bash your enemy's head against).

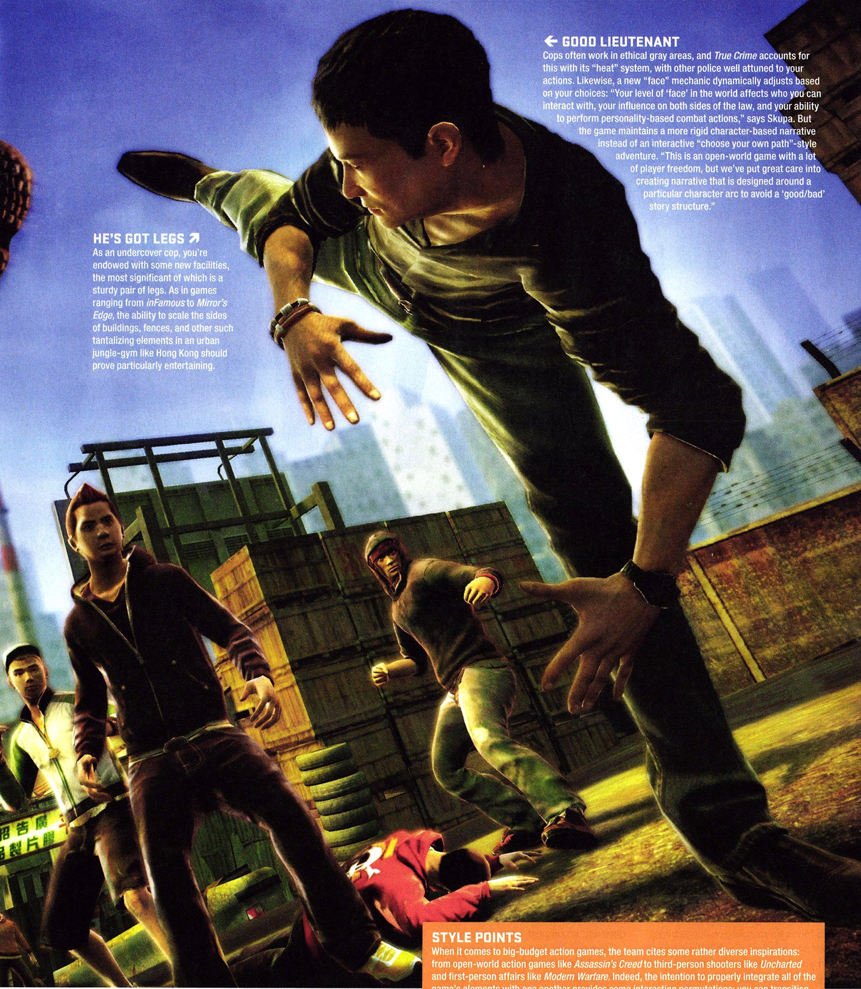
1

Criminal Element

Is the third time a charm for *True Crime?* Welcome to the Big Lychee, officer Kang

When *True Crime: Streets of LA* dropped in 2003, many saw it as Activision's answer to *Grand Theft Auto 3's* breakaway success. Although it flipped the script—unlike *GTA,* here you *were* the cop—it kept many of same ingredients: an "open world" city, strong narrative, and the ability to 'jack any damn car you pleased. It even did some things better: the combat was smoother (with or without guns), and the graphics were, by and large, a cleaner representation of its respective city. And yet the game, along with its sequel, *True Crime: New York City,* lacked *GTA's* grit, depth, and wit, and failed to capture gamers' hearts.

Now the series is back, with United Front Games taking over development duties from Luxoflux, and the dense urban landscapes of Hong Kong providing the game's new stomping grounds. Here's what to expect when *True Crime* hits later this year.



← GOOD LIEUTENANT

Cops often work in ethical gray areas, and *True Crime* accounts for this with its "heat" system, with other police well attuned to your actions. Likewise, a new "face" mechanic dynamically adjusts based on your choices: "Your level of 'face' in the world affects who you can interact with, your influence on both sides of the law, and your ability to perform personality-based combat actions," says Skupa. But the game maintains a more rigid character-based narrative instead of an interactive "choose your own path"-style adventure. "This is an open-world game with a lot of player freedom, but we've put great care into creating narrative that is designed around a particular character arc to avoid a 'good/bad' story structure."

HE'S GOT LEGS ↗

As an undercover cop, you're endowed with some new facilities, the most significant of which is a sturdy pair of legs. As in games ranging from *inFamous* to *Mirror's Edge*, the ability to scale the sides of buildings, fences, and other such tantalizing elements in an urban jungle-gym like Hong Kong should prove particularly entertaining.

STYLE POINTS

When it comes to big-budget action games, the team cites some rather diverse inspirations: from open-world action games like *Assassin's Creed* to third-person shooters like *Uncharted* and first-person affairs like *Modern Warfare*. Indeed, the intention to properly integrate all of the game's elements with one another provides some interesting permutations: you can transition from a motorcycle to another car at full speed, or leap off the back of a motorcycle, aiming and firing your weapon in mid-air. Skupa cites another example of running into an enemy, smashing him into an air conditioner, throwing him into the trunk of your car, and driving off. (Sounds like a hell of a way to start a day, don't you think?)

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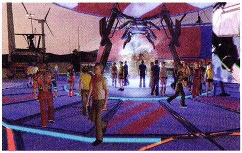
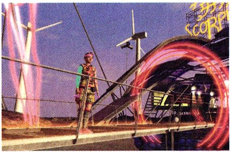
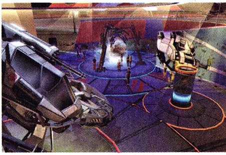






Getting enough **Sodium?**

We dive into *Sodium One*, a new futuristic game space in PlayStation Home

Forget dystopian nightmares. The future has arrived, and it's awash with mini-games, social networking...and cocktails.

Welcome to *Sodium One,* a new interactive space in PlayStation Home where advances in artificial intelligence have led to the elimination of the universe's major problems, allowing its inhabitants to focus on mingling, mixing drinks for one another, and blasting robots in a tank game called Salt Shooter. Not only is *Sodium One* a major aesthetic leap from what we've seen before on Home, but it also includes several new features, such as Twitter and Facebook integration and useable virtual items.

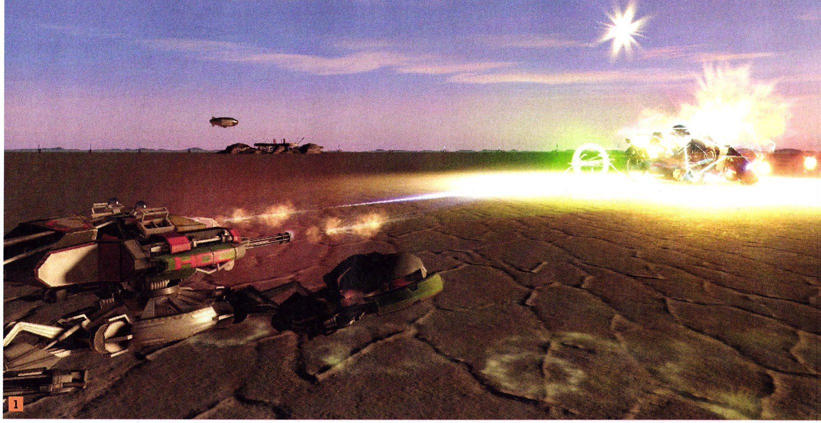
Home has played host to dozens of new interactive spaces since opening up to public beta in late 2008, but original content is often eschewed in favor of experiences based around popular games and brands. Developer Outso created many of the licensed spaces, including *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves, inFamous,* and *Resistance 2,* but its latest project is something entirely different: an original world all its own.

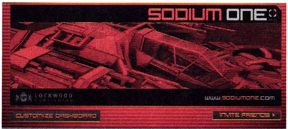
Home's "positive atmosphere and feeling" triggered the desire to create the space, says Halli Bjornsson, Outso's chief executive officer, but it was inspirations like salt flats racing, the Burning Man festival, and Ray Kurzweil's *The Singularity Is Near*—a book about nanotechnology and AI development—that really drove the idea. From a more practical standpoint, Bjornsson says Home is the perfect destination for *Sodium One* because of the popularity of the service, as well as the ability to start with a basic idea and expand it over time based on user interest and feedback.

Though the highlight of the current *Sodium One* experience is the Salt Shooter game, with its 50 unique stages and customizable tanks, the *Sodium* hub plays host to a couple of other amusing diversions. Notably, a scorpion-stomping game can be played within the main space, a feature distinct to *Sodium One.* "This is a departure from all of Home's other mini-games," explains chief technical officer Justin Johnson. "We also thought it would be great for all players in the space to share the experience. Every player in the space can be engaged in this game at once."

The initial rollout includes just a few primary activities, but Outso promises that future *Sodium* updates will expand upon the core premise in interesting and perhaps unforeseen ways.

"We've got big plans to grow *Sodium* and are working on the next iterations at this moment," promises Joel Kemp, chief operating officer at the studio. "It's also a journey for ourselves, and sometimes we change direction rather quickly from a creative point of view when we see something exciting we can explore."

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Shoot, Stomp, Swing

Six things to do in *Sodium One*

1 Play Salt Shooter
It'll set you back $4.99, but this fast-paced desert shooter is more akin to a full PSN release than a typical Home mini-game, letting you progress through 50 levels and modify your vehicle with unlockables.

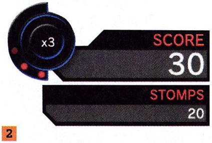
2 Notch a high score
Not only does the free Tank Trainer game prepare you for Salt Shooter—it's also a challenging little game in its own right. Try to hit a score of 10 or higher!

3 Mix up some fun
Eying that cute avatar at the end of the bar? Make her a drink at Scorpio's in record time to earn credits and start the conversation. (Virtual) liquid courage, indeed.

4 Run some errands
Talking to VICKIE, *Sodium One's* resident AI helper, reveals your progress toward completing objectives (tied to the mini-games), which earn you credits for avatar clothing and accessories.

5 Get stompin'
Ever dreamed of stepping on a mess of scorpions? (No?) Well, *Sodium One* lets you do just that in one portion of the space, though you'll need to buy special boots to smash the biggest ones.

6 Spice up your avatar
Sodium One also introduces new apparel and ornaments to customize your avatar and personal spaces, including glow sticks, animated T-shirts, and neon sofas.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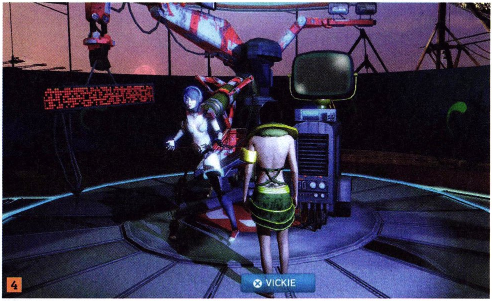
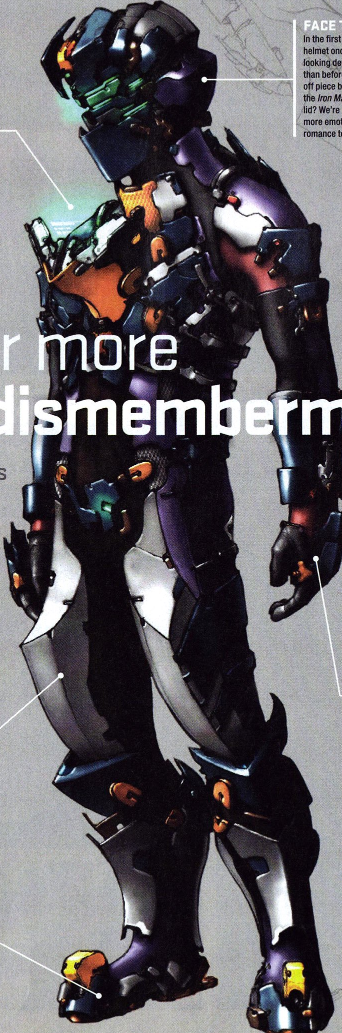


3

Gear up for more strategic dismemberment

A sneak peek at Isaac Clarke's new suit in *Dead Space 2*

Isaac Clarke is pissed. His girlfriend is dead. The Marker—a mysterious item that distorts reality to anyone who gets near it—may have permanently affected his ability to think straight. And now, he just wants to paint the sky with lead (you know, *plasma* lead). He's about to get his chance. *Dead Space 2,* the sequel to 2008's original game, will give us reason to get scared all over again later this year. Clarke returns with new weapons, upgraded armor, and a proactive stance on killing the growing threat to humanity, the necromorphs.



GOT YOUR BACK
Since *Dead Space 2* is sure to deliver dozens of dark spaces, the glow on Clarke's suit won't be just for show. In addition to his chest and face, the bright blue light will likely appear on his back, showing his health and status.

FACE TIME
In the first *Dead Space,* Clarke took off his helmet once. In the sequel, the intricate-looking device on his head is better armored than before and will split in two, peeling off piece by piece like Tony Stark's suit in the *Iron Man* movie. But why remove the lid? We're guessing it's so Clarke can show more emotion—and perhaps enjoy a bit of romance too.

FIRE WHEN READY
Although not shown here, Clarke's trusty plasma cutter makes a return. He'll also wield an explosive javelin to pin enemies to walls (it can also electrocute its target or explode like a grenade), along with a new, unnamed weapon that fires proximity mines.

BETTER THAN NASA
Clarke's suit is designed with a mixture of American and Japanese art styles, providing him with heavy-duty armor geared for zero-G and close-quarters space combat—along with a futuristic flair for good looks.

READY TO RUMBLE
EA is building out the combat scenarios in *Dead Space 2* to include zero-G space fights, which is why the suit now features better navigation tools such as mini-wings on Clarke's legs and thrusters on his toes and heels.

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4

SONY
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Next Tech

Who needs flying cars? We've got waves of innovation coming to transform our PS3s

LOOKING BACKWARDS

Sony has mentioned the possibility of PS2 titles coming to PSN before, so we wouldn't be surprised if the console's early classics like *Ico* hit the network before long. Unfortunately, since the PS2 still sells, Sony seems reluctant to reintroduce full backwards compatibility to the PS3. But the recent addition of Minis emulation suggests that classic PSP titles might be available for PS3 soon as well. Sony definitely needs to get more PSP titles onto its portable store for PSPgo gamers, so it's not a bad bet.

Also, though it's not confirmed and it's not official Sony tech, Logitech is looking to give PSPgo its disc drive back. Apart from adding some considerable bulk to the PSPgo's frame, the accessory would grant owners of previous PSP iterations access to their back catalogues. Not only that, but it would give PSPgo gamers a chance to pick up UMD titles on the cheap, even if it isn't a particularly portable solution.

IN MOTION

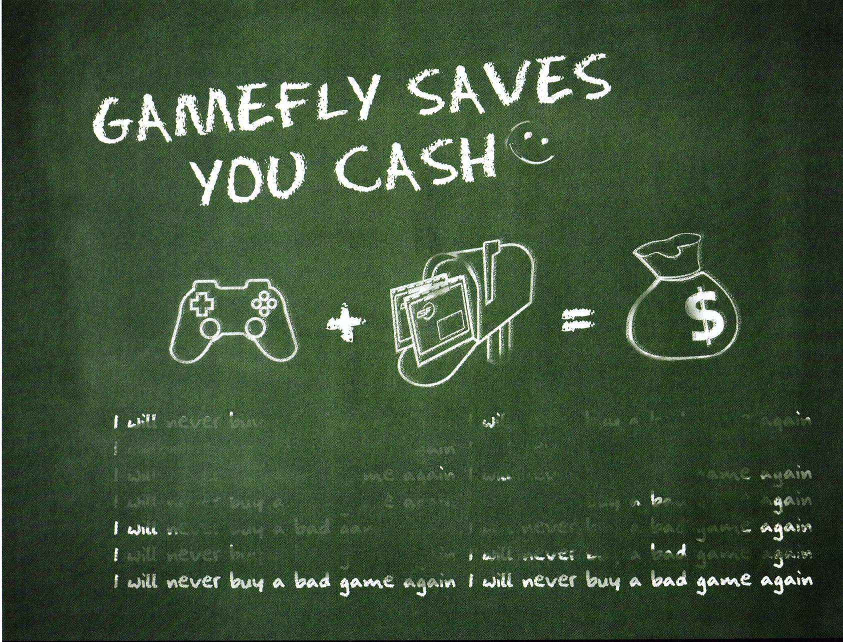
We've seen the future, and it's a stick with a glowing ball on top. Publishers like Ubisoft and EA are already promising a slew of (as-of-yet secret) releases to utilize the new motion controller tech, and we already know about Capcom's *Resident Evil 5: Director's Cut,* a new *Ape Escape,* and the family friendly-sounding *Motion Party.* The new control scheme has great potential and an array of recent add-on patents suggests Sony will concoct a tighter control scheme than an awkward DualShock plus motion controller wand combo.

There's also been talk of a paid-for "way to play" in 2010. Whether paying for all PSN access or just for exclusive extras, a premium PSN looks increasingly likely. Sony's currently free service is one of the PS3's best features, so we doubt it will ever get removed entirely. That said, we'd begrudgingly welcome a revamped PSN with extra subscriber functionality, like cross-game chat and exclusive PSN downloads.

FUTURE VISION

3D has come a long way since the days of geeky red-and-blue specs. In fact, 3D gaming *without the glasses* could hit homes in the next decade on special new TVs. High quality glasses-based 3D gaming will be with us much sooner though, with a 120Hz TV being the "only" requirement. Games? *GT5* and *WipEout HD* have already been 3D-demoed, and we predict that Sony will put 3D games on PSN soon.

Aside from the 3D goodness, cross-game party chat is the obvious "next big feature," even though it might be restricted to paid subscribers. Also, PSP's new comic reader works just like a third-party app, suggesting other official third-party programs for both PS3 and PSP could be on the way. SCEA exec John Koller hints that Sony's 2010 plans include a lot more features and firmware additions for PS3. Both Skype and music-service Spotify are rumored to be among the possibilities.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Final Fantasy XIII: The first two hours

Our man in Japan is playing it now. Here's what he thinks so far...

So, it's finally out. After years of anticipation, Japan has taken the day off work to get to grips with the first current-gen installment of the *Final Fantasy* franchise. Was it worth the wait? It depends on how much you like cutscenes.

Linearity concerns

Main characters Lightning, Snow, Sazh, and friends are rendered in such detail that you can see the lines on their lips and the patterns on the soles of their shoes. There's still a confusingly grand plot peppered with inter-character bickering across the opening hours though, don't worry. It's classic *Final Fantasy*.

It's stuffed with cutscenes so lengthy they can be paused or skipped, with handy save points presented at the end. In a series that has been famed for its eye candy, *FFXIII* is one of the most visually rich games ever to grace PS3.

The game's course is entirely linear, so while the player-controlled camera offers the illusion of depth of field, in fact you can only really keep moving in one direction. Battle encounters start out limited, though they will no doubt open up through the course of the game as new elements are introduced in the tutorials (we hope you have a big TV screen, as the tiny font is barely visible to the naked eye).

Early on, the ATB Gauge is introduced. The length of your gauge determines how many attacks you can string together in encounters. Combos are key to dispatching enemies quickly, as consecutive hits raise their Break Gauge; when it's full, they glow red and your hits do more damage. It's quite some hours before the game's leveling and Optima systems are introduced. For now, battles are repetitive and easily won. But they sure do look nice. And let's face it, that's the reason the majority of Japanese gamers are ditching work to play *Final Fantasy* anyway...

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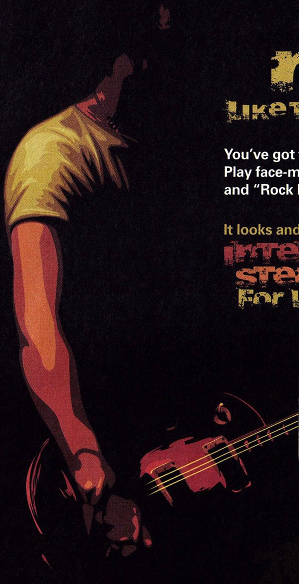

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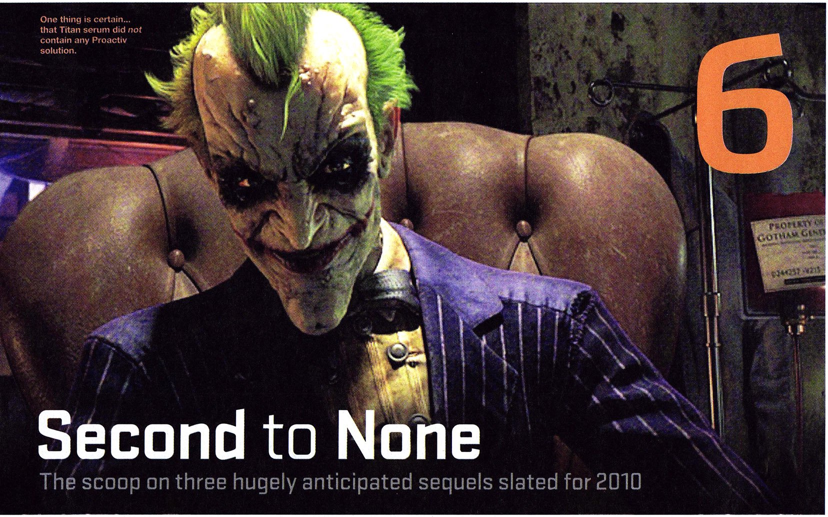


One thing is certain... that Titan serum did *not* contain any Proactiv solution.

Second to None

The scoop on three hugely anticipated sequels slated for 2010

Batman: Arkham Asylum 2

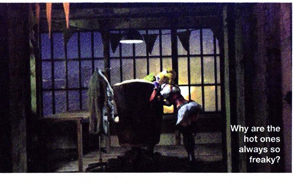
Thought Arkham Island was big? In the sequel, the Asylum has spilled into a whole section of Gotham City. And The Joker is back, along with his ever-present helper Harley Quinn. He's worse for the wear, suffering the side effects of the Titan serum he injected at the end of the last game, but still seems to be in control of the new Gotham. Several new villains have also been hinted at in the announce trailer. We spotted a poster of Harvey "Two Face" Dent and a suspicious black cat skulking across a fire escape. Catwoman, anyone? We also saw The Penguin's Iceberg Lounge in the fly-by, and a business called "Sionis"—the real name of lesser-known Batman villain Black Mask.

inFamous 2

At the end of *inFamous,* Cole McGrath's possible future was divulged, giving him the opportunity to steel himself for the coming challenges. One of these challenges? The Beast, an entity predicted to destroy much of Empire City. We're betting the sequel picks up some significant time after the first game, offering a reshaped metropolis. And because of the difficulty in reflecting the effects of Cole's decisions (the first game ended with him ready to either defend Empire or take it by force), we suspect there'll be a reason—whether he's exiled himself for training or been captured by the government—that he hasn't been active in its redevelopment. It was hinted that harsh decisions lay ahead, and we're hoping that means your options won't be as black-and-white next time around.

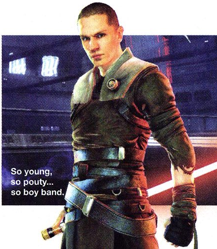
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed 2

Scale. That's how LucasArts is looking to improve on the original's fun but flawed gameplay. In the first-glimpse trailer for *The Force Unleashed 2,* the moody anti-hero of the original faces off against a gargantuan beast—one that dwarfs the rancor Luke fought in *Return of the Jedi*—in an epic-size arena. Not exciting enough? Try dual lightsaber wielding—one for each hand—which promises enhanced moves and more hectic fighting. Of course, we've no idea how the game's events will tie in to the overall *Star Wars* canon. But from the trailer's teasing whispers, Yoda looks set to play a big part.



Why are the hot ones always so freaky?

Rock the vote—Cole McGrath for mayor.



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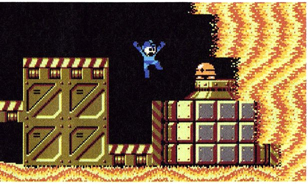
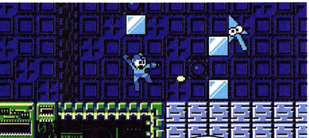
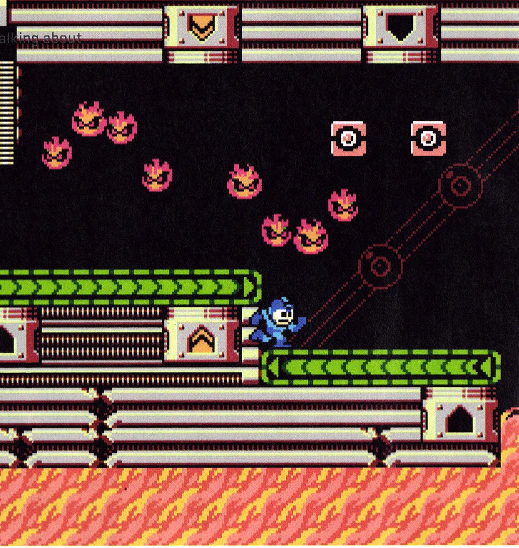
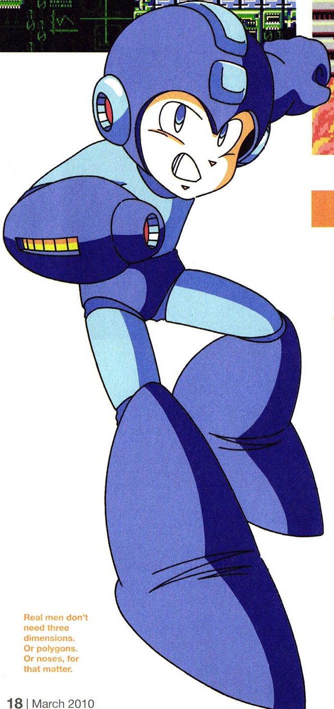








Real men don't need three dimensions. Or polygons. Or noses, for that matter.

7 Man Up

Think you're hardcore? *Mega Man 10* will use and abuse you

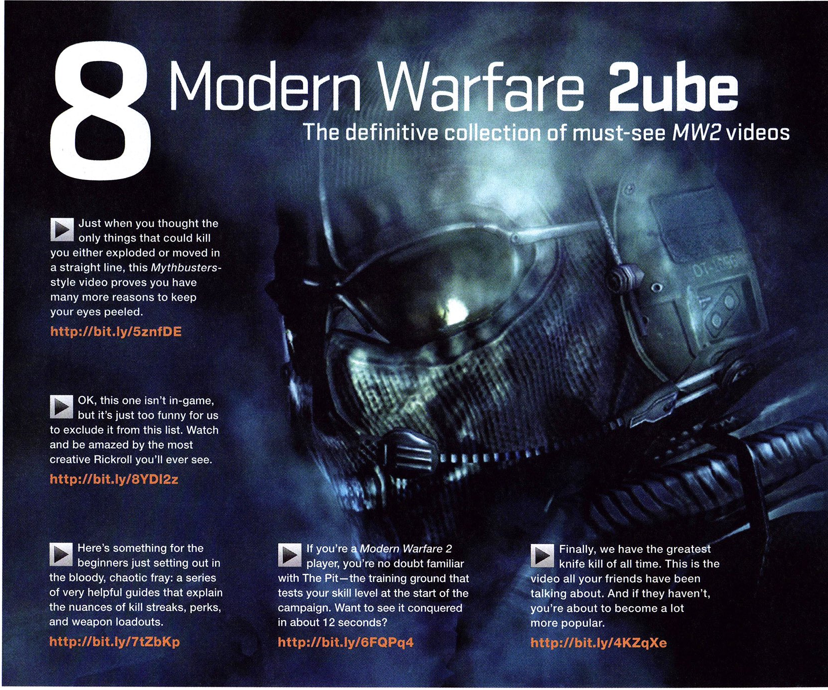
Since its announcement, *Mega Man 10* has had the hardcore gaming scene abuzz. Why's that? Because this is the type of game that separates the men from the boys—a series known around the world for kicking ass and still not bothering to take any names. The previous entry in the series didn't just garner huge praise for its refusal to play nice, but also for its lovingly crafted, ultra-old-school graphics that look exactly like what crusty old gamers were playing in the '80s.

The premise is dead simple: You're Mega Man. He shoots bullets or beams or whatever from his arm cannon. Mega Man has to beat up on eight other robot bosses, each of which contains a secret weapon that you can steal and use for the rest of the game.

Pretty straightforward, huh? The real twist is that all of these 'bots are amazingly resilient to any attack that doesn't target their one weakness, which conveniently happens to require one of the other bosses' weapons. Thus begins the proud tradition of gamers around the world trying to discover the fastest, most efficient path through all eight of these deviously designed enemies, each with an increasingly silly name.

So far we only know two: Commando Man (a camouflaged army 'bot) and uh...Sheep Man. Yes, it's a robot sheep man thing. (Shush, nonbeliever, we think it's actually cool, in a throwback kind of way.)

Even if you know their weaknesses, each boss has a ruthlessly challenging stage to complete, usually loaded with bottomless pits, difficult enemies, and more than a few one-hit deaths. If this sounds too tough, don't fret—there's an easy mode that alters the levels and makes it possible for everyone, hardcore or not, to see why this has been one of gaming's most beloved franchises for 22 years.



8 Modern Warfare 2ube

The definitive collection of must-see *MW2* videos

▶ Just when you thought the only things that could kill you either exploded or moved in a straight line, this *Mythbusters*-style video proves you have many more reasons to keep your eyes peeled.

http://bit.ly/5znfDE

▶ OK, this one isn't in-game, but it's just too funny for us to exclude it from this list. Watch and be amazed by the most creative Rickroll you'll ever see.

http://bit.ly/8YDl2z

▶ Here's something for the beginners just setting out in the bloody, chaotic fray: a series of very helpful guides that explain the nuances of kill streaks, perks, and weapon loadouts.

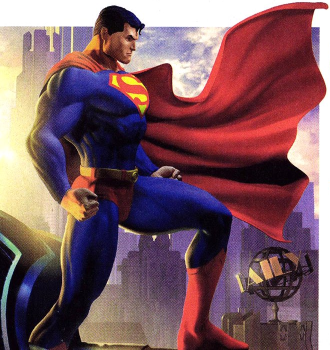
http://bit.ly/7tZbKp

▶ If you're a *Modern Warfare 2* player, you're no doubt familiar with The Pit—the training ground that tests your skill level at the start of the campaign. Want to see it conquered in about 12 seconds?

http://bit.ly/6FQPq4

▶ Finally, we have the greatest knife kill of all time. This is the video all your friends have been talking about. And if they haven't, you're about to become a lot more popular.

http://bit.ly/4KZqXe



9 MMOs of 2010

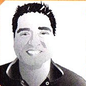
Spies, superheroes, and space—PSN is finally ready to get massive

2010's set to be a big year for massively multiplayer online action with a stellar roster of first-party titles just over the horizon, including *The Agency,* with its heady mix of espionage and explosions; *DC Universe Online,* in which you create your own hero or villain in a city populated by DC Comics characters; and *Free Realms,* the free-to-play MMO aimed at a slightly younger audience (or people who are really into cute). Then there's the heavily rumored PS3 port of *Star Trek Online*—which blends on-foot combat with some tactical space battling and looks superb—and a newly announced zombie-apocalypse MMO from the creator of *Guild Wars* that could hit PS3. We've also heard rumors that console versions of BioWare's next opus, *Star Wars: The Old Republic,* might emerge. Yes, please—we call the bounty hunter.

Roger warns: "At this rate, bullets will become DLC—and it ain't gonna be free."

10 Should DLC always be free?

PTOM's budget-minded editors face off on this bottom-line issue



YES

Says the rebel cheapskate

Roger Burchill

You always get screwed in the drive-through. It's not until you're home, prepared to devour your mega-meal, that you yelp, "Hey, I didn't get my fries!" And so it is with games.

You've forked over your 60 bucks, you're ready to sink your teeth into some serious gameplay, but thanks to DLC you get to pay a "nominal" fee to buy the content they "forgot" to put in your bag. Characters, costumes, multiplayer *modes*—where does it end? Talk about a system rife for profiteering abuse...

The naïve say that DLC enhances your long-term enjoyment of a game, but there was a time when replay value didn't come a la carte. The fact is, there's no better marketing for a company than to keep you playing its games. DLC should be a gift to gamers to cement brand loyalty, *not* something to pad the corporate bottom line from day one.

NO

Says the supportive spendthrift

Gary Steinman

If games are—as my cohort suggests—a meal, then DLC can turn an ordinary supper into a multi-course feast. But understand this: Games aren't all-you-can-eat. At some point you have to pay to play. And in order to support developers—and extend the life of a game I love—I'm willing to pony up.

Now, I'm not irrational in my apparent desire to part with my cash. Not all DLC is worth it. But when you get a good three to six hours of gameplay, or a new set of weapons that reinvigorate your game and make another go-around worth it, or a new batch of multiplayer maps that could've been packaged as a paid-for expansion pack back when those existed, I'm on board.

But enough idle chitchat. I'm gonna shoot for some *more* loot in *Borderlands'* Mad Moxxi's Underdome Riot. Care to join me? Well, then, you're gonna hafta to drop a sawbuck.

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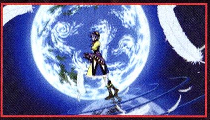

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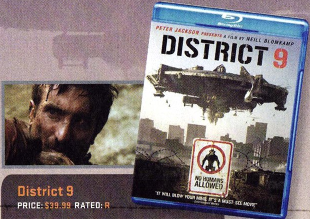
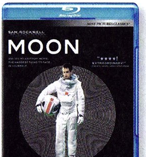

PETER JACKSON PRESENTS A FILM BY NEILL BLOMKAMP
DISTRICT 9
NO HUMANS ALLOWED
"IT WILL BLOW YOUR MIND. IT'S A MUST-SEE MOVIE"

District 9

PRICE: $39.99 **RATED:** R

✚ **| MOVIE |** It's almost certain that first-time director Neill Blomkamp will be one of the top directors in Hollywood in the next 10 years thanks to this amazingly assured sci-fi thriller. Shot partly in a documentary style on a relatively shoestring budget of $30 million, *District 9* isn't subtle in its apartheid commentary, but South Africa provides a fresh and almost alien landscape to tell the story of extraterrestrials trapped on Earth. Although the film was a critical and box-office success, one of its few problems is the utterly selfish and almost completely unlikeable human lead. But the lead alien characters are surprisingly identifiable and the action sequences simply stunning—making for a notable directorial debut that shouldn't be missed.

| EXTRAS | Sony knew that gamers would dig the film and went the extra mile with a great array of extras. The director's commentary is fantastic (and available to be viewed as subtitles—a great touch); there's an insane amount of behind-the-scenes material and deleted scenes; and, in a brilliant bit of cross marketing, there's a game demo and an exclusive making-of featurette for *God of War III.*



Moon

PRICE: $37.95 **RATED:** R

✚ **| MOVIE |** The sci-fi genre seems to be experiencing a directorial renaissance thanks to newcomers like Duncan Jones. *Moon* is, simply, the best intellectually minded science-fiction film since Danny Boyle's *Sunshine.* Sam Rockwell—as the lone employee of a lunar mining station who suddenly discovers he might not be alone—is brilliant in a difficult and multifaceted role. The story plays out as a tense and logical mystery, with gorgeous visuals and excellent cinematography.

| EXTRAS | Two solid commentary tracks delve deeper into the story and a slew of behind-the-scenes material make this a great addition to any sci-fi lover's collection.

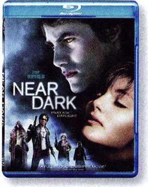
ZOMBIELAND
"Superbad meets Shaun of the Dead."

Zombieland

PRICE: $39.95 **RATED:** R

✚ **| MOVIE |** *Zombieland* is an arguably better American take on *Shaun of the Dead*—it's not so much a zombie flick as a buddy movie and romantic comedy that takes place in a zombie-infested world. The violence and action are great, but take a back seat to the dialogue and characters. Woody Harrelson is in his redneck element with Jesse Eisenberg serving as his nerd foil, and the movie has what may be the greatest celebrity cameo ever.

| EXTRAS | The disc has deleted scenes and several behind-the-scenes videos, but the crowded cast and crew commentary is the real icing on the undead cake.

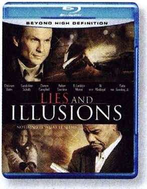


Near Dark

PRICE: $19.99 RATED: R

+ | **MOVIE** | Directed and co-written by James Cameron protégé, Kathryn Bigelow, *Near Dark* ranks among the best American vampire movies ever made. Lance Henrikson, Bill Paxton, and Jeanette Goldstein were all in *Aliens* the year prior to *Near Dark's* filming, and a young Adrian Pasdar (Nathan Petrelli of *Heroes)* plays a farm boy trapped with a group of psychopathic vampires. It's a violent, satisfying horror action flick that deserves rediscovery on BD.

| **EXTRAS** | The extras, including commentary by Bigelow and a decent documentary, are all from the DVD special edition, but still quite good.

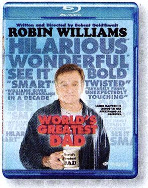


Lies and Illusions

PRICE: $29.97 RATED: R

– | **MOVIE** | Poor Christian Slater can't get a break. In this incompetent attempt to emulate Hitchcock's wrong-man-style, Slater plays a writer who finds himself hounded by assassins after his fiancée is kidnapped. As illogical as the script is, Slater exhibits exceptional charm and wit and becomes funnier as the movie progresses. In stark contrast, Cuba Gooding Jr. deserves special recognition for one of the most laughably awful attempts at being nefarious you'll likely ever see.

| **EXTRAS** | A brief making-of featurette with bored-looking participants is the only extra.

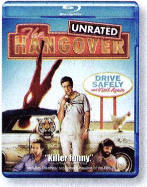


World's Greatest Dad

PRICE: $34.98 RATED: R

+ | **MOVIE** | Bobcat Goldthwait wrote and directed this brilliant black comedy about a father whose son's accidental suicide helps him to realize his dream of becoming a famous writer. Robin Williams' performance is subtle, pitch perfect, and deserving of accolades, while the dialogue is sly and hilarious without resorting to unnecessary obnoxiousness. The movie is powerfully funny with an improbably sensitive take on failed dreams and lousy kids.

| **EXTRAS** | Goldthwait's commentary is refreshingly low-key, providing interesting tidbits and humor from the perspective of a self-admitted painkiller-addled comedian.

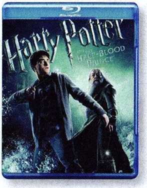


The Hangover

PRICE: $35.99 RATED: R/UNRATED

+ | **MOVIE** | Set around the drunken misadventures of three groomsmen attending a Las Vegas bachelor party, *The Hangover* desperately tries to be extreme and outrageous, but often stumbles. It's funny, and some of the situations are clever, but compared to other rude and crude bromances, it's almost tame. But if you enjoyed director Todd Phillips' *Old School,* you'll probably enjoy *The Hangover*—at least until the booze wears off.

| **EXTRAS** | The extras are surprisingly lightweight with the picture-in-picture commentary being the highlight over a bunch of lame gag videos.

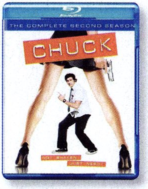


Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

PRICE: $35.99 RATED: PG

+ | **MOVIE** | The latest *Harry Potter* is really *The Empire Strikes Back* of the series. It's all a build-up to the final movie, and while it has a surprisingly dramatic ending, there's no big climax to top off the character and plot developments. Like all the films, it's a stunning-looking affair with gorgeous, moody visuals and phenomenal audio.

| **EXTRAS** | There's a superb selection of behind-the-scenes material, but the forthcoming Ultimate Box set version is sure to supersede it. Still, casual viewers will be perfectly happy with the exceptional second disc of extras.



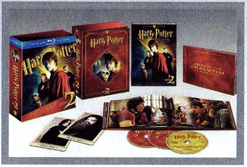
Chuck: Season 2

PRICE: $69.97 RATED: NR

+ | **MOVIE** | *Chuck* remains one of the most endearingly fun shows on TV for a reason: The main character is goofy, nerdy, and completely likeable, his fake girlfriend bodyguard is insanely hot, and each episode manages to play off a mix of nerd heroism and spy chic with a great sense of style and comedy.

| **EXTRAS** | There's even a 3D episode—two pairs of glasses come included—and a solid if mostly superfluous collection of behind-the-scenes extras to round out this very worthy addition to your TV BD collection.

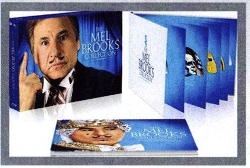
Best Boxed Sets



Harry Potter: Ultimate Editions

PRICE: $49.99 each RATED: PG

Aiming for the hardcore *Harry Potter* fan, Warner Bros. is releasing each movie in a four-disc boxed set. The Ultimate Edition package includes both the theatrical version of the movie (sporting an in-movie experience that's a great mash-up of commentary and picture-in-picture material) and an expanded cut that adds up to 15 minutes of new material. Previously released BD extras are included, but there's also a new multi-installment feature-length documentary that will require the purchase of all the Ultimate Editions to complete.

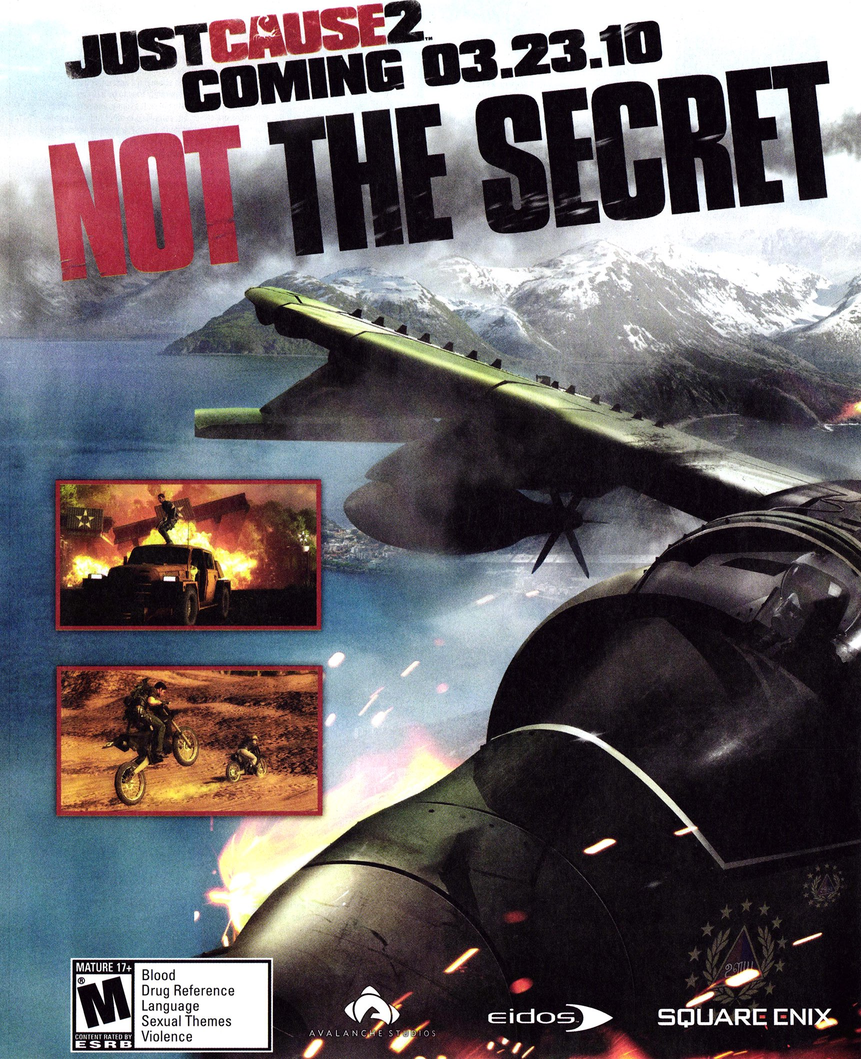


The Mel Brooks Collection

PRICE: $139.99 RATED: NR

A true joy for fans of the genius comedian filmmaker, The Mel Brooks Collection includes *Blazing Saddles, Young Frankenstein, Silent Movie, Robin Hood: Men in Tights, To Be or Not to Be, History of the World: Part 1, Twelve Chairs,* and *High Anxiety.* There's a hardback retrospective book, and while the rest of the extras are hit and miss, the films themselves are classics—with this set being the only way to get seven of the nine included films on BD. *(Young Frankenstein* and *Blazing Saddles* were previously released.)

Questions, comments, rants, raves about our Blu-ray reviews? Email Jason D'Aprile at **PTOM_Bluray@futureus.com.**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M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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Drug Reference
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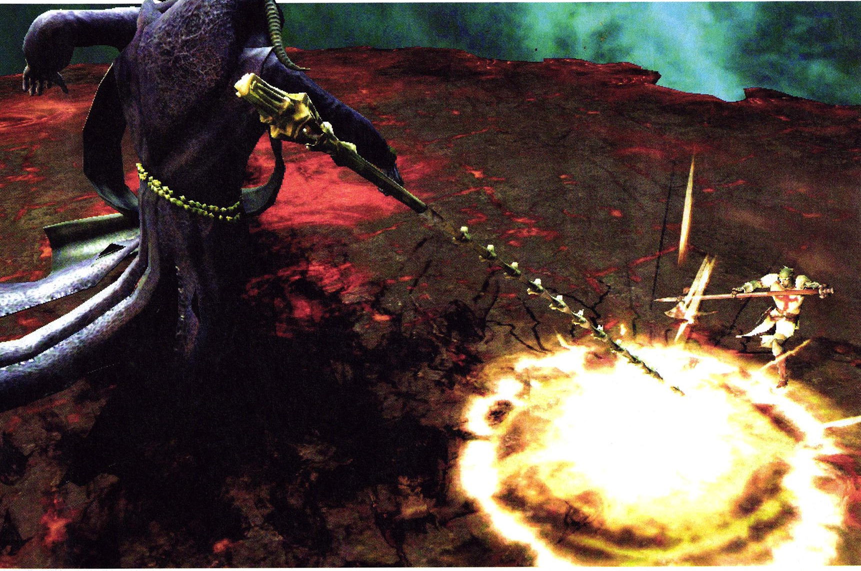
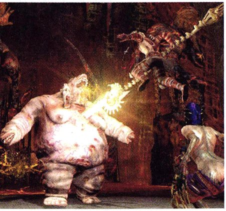


DANTE'S INFERNO

Hell-bent for glory

PS3 AVAILABLE: February GENRE: Action PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: Visceral Games



↗ **The Gluttony level is particularly gross with these foul slobs puking at you and—we swear we aren't making this up—farting deadly gasses in your general direction.**

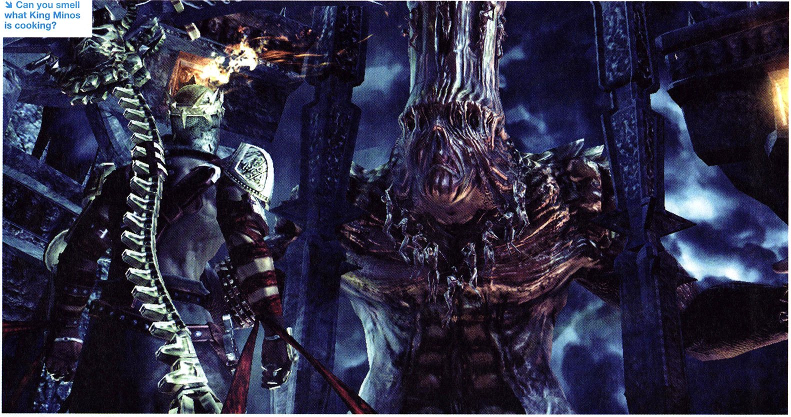
Stunning. Terrifying. Imaginative.

Yes, those are just some of the words that come to mind after playing the first four levels of EA's soon-to-be-released epic action game, *Dante's Inferno.* No, we're not on the payroll; just the opposite. We've seen the game several times in 2009, and nothing has made the kind of impression that this nearly complete preview build has seared into our collective memory cells.

Following the path that Sony's award-winning, genre-defining *God of War* blazed in 2005, EA has ambitiously hurled itself into the epic action fire. After what seems like several years, the near final product has been wrought, and it's impressive. This preview build shines with powerful special effects, non-stop action, elaborate level designs, and a grandiose vision of hell that only grows bigger the further Dante descends into it.

The dark journey starts majestically and never lets up. You play Dante, a troubled soldier who, having completed a three-year holy war, confronts Death himself in the first major fight scene. During this encounter you'll learn all your basic moves—light and heavy attacks, blocks, dodges, juggles—then you'll quite literally defy Death by stealing his own bone scythe to slay him.

Upon returning to your idyllic countryside home in Italy you'll discover that your father and Beatrice, your wife, have been murdered. As you approach Beatrice's cold body lying in the backyard, Satan appears



Can you smell what King Minos is cooking?

> “In the Lust mission, crazy vixens lash you with their extended wombs that look like tongues. Yes, it’s as gross as it sounds.”

and whisks her away, laughing and taunting you to follow. What choice do you have? Satan just took your wife. You gotta chase him. The ground cracks open, the earth collapses, and down into Hell you go.

Vicious circles

Dante’s Inferno, the game, is based on Dante Alighieri’s 13th century poem, *The Divine Comedy.* It loosely follows the first book, *Inferno*, building the videogame around the frightening prospect of entering Satan’s domain and fighting through all nine circles of Hell to find and safely return with Beatrice. Developer Visceral has done an absolutely stunning job of translating the horror of Alighieri’s vivid literary work and breathing fiery life into its videogame form.

You’ll encounter every level of Hell—Limbo, Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Anger, Heresy, Violence, Fraud, and Treachery—each one depicted with shocking animations of damned souls trapped in honeycombed walls, caught in whirlwinds of everlasting lust, and screaming in agony as they tumble down blazing lava falls. You’ll face off against major historical and mythological characters, such as King Minos, Cleopatra (and her warrior lover, Anthony), and the three-headed dragon beast Cerberus in the pits of Gluttony—and that’s just in the first two hours.

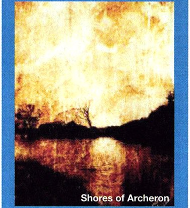
When *Dante’s Inferno* isn’t wowing you with hellish landscapes, the game presents a smart balance of combat, puzzles, boss fights, and platforming in enormous, highly detailed environments. Take the Limbo mission: Dante must first board the living ship of Charon to pass through Limbo, then tame and mount an Asterian Beast (think a massive Minotaur from Hell) and finally rip off Charon’s head to pass.

Towering inferno

Each circle of Hell is wildly different. The Lust mission is eye opening because it’s teeming with half-naked, sex-crazed, demonic women…who want to kill you. Leaping onto a towering whirlwind—with tortured souls forever flying in circles after one another but never reaching them—you’ll combat Temptresses of Lust. These crazy vixens lash you with their extended wombs that look like tongues. (Yes, it’s as creepy and gross as it sounds.) You’ll then climb up Cleopatra’s massive tower (yes, it’s phallic), solving environmental puzzles and watching a gigantic half-naked Cleopatra flop her massive boobs around, from which nasty little unbaptized children descend to fight you. You’ll then reach the top and confront a ghoulish Mark Antony and hideous Cleopatra in an epic boss battle.

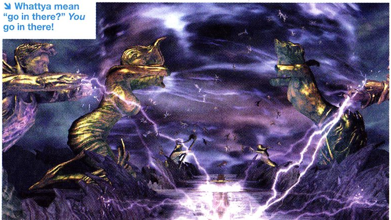
Call us crazy, but now you know why, come February, we’ll be going straight to Hell. | Douglass C. Perry

Google It!

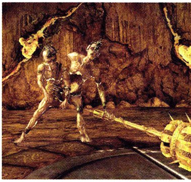


Shores of Archeron

If *Dante’s Inferno* is challenging your literary knowledge, don’t worry—the Web will help. When we looked up the Shores of Acheron, we learned it’s a death metal band that’s touring! (http://bit.ly/MFIwU) If you wonder what Charon’s Oar is, it’s a college text-based adventure. W00t! (http://bit.ly/5LF9Jq) And Cerberus, the three-headed beast found in the Lust level, is actually a group-based email management project. (www.cerberusweb.com) Thank you, Internet!



Whattya mean “go in there?” *You* go in there!



RED DEAD REDEMPTION

How the West will be won

PS3 AVAILABLE: April GENRE: Adventure PUBLISHER: Rockstar DEVELOPERS: Rockstar San Diego

As its name suggests, the Wild West is difficult to tame—especially when it comes to games. Several have tried *(Call of Juarez, Gun, Darkwatch),* but they've all fallen short of really capturing the look and mood of the period. Thankfully, that's going to change in April when *Red Dead Redemption* finally gallops onto PS3.

The first thing we see in our latest demo is protagonist John Marsden climbing out of his makeshift bed and kicking dust over the embers of last night's campfire. As he packs up his gear, a brilliantly orange sun peeps over the side of the canyon, bathing the scrublands of Nuevo Paraiso in a beautiful tangerine light. Now *this* is the Wild West we know and love from Sergio Leone's spaghetti Westerns. Visually, it's a step up from *GTA*—its epic vistas sit somewhere between the mighty *Assassin's Creed II* and the mightier *Uncharted 2.* Impressive. Marsden mounts his horse and sets out towards the nearest town to find employment. As he rides through the scrub we see an armadillo dash out from cover to escape being trampled, and in the distance we spot a Mexican waving his arms at us.

Mexican stand-off

Side-missions in *Red Dead Redemption* are randomly generated, and you can choose to accept or decline them on the fly. We approach the Mexican and hear he's trying to recover three prisoners who have escaped from a convoy. We offer our services and gallop towards the first target, indicated by a red dot on the handy *GTA IV*-style radar at the bottom left of the screen. *Bang!* He goes down following a shot from our Winchester. The other couple of prisoners fall the same way, and we're soon back to claim our reward.

Next up, Marsden heads towards the town of Chuparosa. As he approaches, we see the crumbling, white-washed walls, the rickety stalls selling all kinds of goods, and the town hall tucked away in the center. Again, it all looks spot-on. We half expect to see Clint Eastwood's "Man With No Name" wander past and tip his hat. Approaching the town hall, we see a sheriff nailing a wanted poster to the wall, so we investigate. The fee on offer is $200 alive, $100 dead, and we accept the task of bringing him in.

Fame and fortune

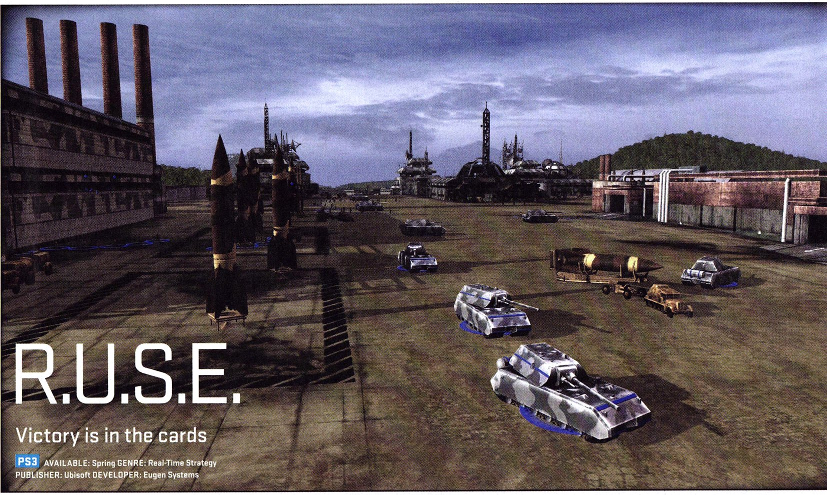
The rewards for acts like this extend beyond simply doing a job and getting paid. Everything you do affects Marsden's Honor and Fame. Honor is dictated by whether your deeds are law abiding or criminal—do plenty of work for the local sheriffs, for example, and you'll be seen as honorable, which in turn means you'll be more trusted by the law. Work with the bandits and you'll be seen as dishonorable. Your honor alignment then feeds into your Fame, which is boosted by everything you do: put simply, the more side-missions you take on, the more famous you get. As you become known throughout the West, you'll notice the game reacting to you. Famous, law-abiding Marsdens will see store discounts and people offering friendly advice. Less well-behaved Marsdens may be shunned, and will often be called out by bandits for duels when these criminals decide a town "isn't big enough for the both of you."

Speaking of crime, *Red Dead Redemption* has a smart way of dealing with lawbreakers. Every illegal action you perform will put a bounty on your head, and the more hell you raise, the bigger the sum gets. After your initial crime you're chased by the law, and this plays out almost identically to *GTA IV*, with you fleeing the red zone on your radar until the heat dies down. However, just because you escape the first time, that doesn't mean the bounty goes away. It stays on your head until you pay it off or get a letter of pardon from the local law by assisting in raids on bandits or rescuing captured deputies.

Back in the shoes of John Marsden, and we're reaching the end of a long day. We captured that wanted man—alive, by the way—visited a local tavern to play a few hands of cards and flirt with the local whores, and searched for a hidden stash of gold bars pin-pointed by a map we bought in Chuparosa. It's been a busy day, and as we spark up the campfire and prepare for some shut-eye (and save our game), the clouds roll away revealing a spectacular star-lit sky. And as our eyelids droop, our thoughts drift to April, when we can finally wake up and live the rest of Marsden's life in this hugely promising Wild West adventure. | **Andy Hartup**

"Visually, it's a step up from *GTA*—its epic vistas sit somewhere between the mighty *Assassin's Creed II* and the mightier *Uncharted 2*. Impressive."

↙ With over 200 types of units in the game, rock-paper-scissors doesn't even begin to describe it.



R.U.S.E.

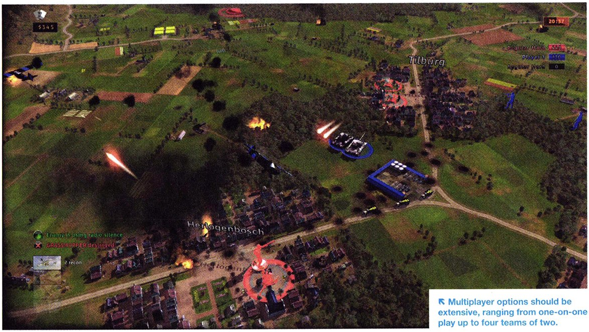
Victory is in the cards

PS3 AVAILABLE: Spring GENRE: Real-Time Strategy
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Eugen Systems

Deep within the stone confines of a medieval stronghold, immersed in the oppressive darkness of a long forgotten dungeon, a woman slumps against a wall, barely alive, when suddenly footsteps begin to echo through the corridors—the soundtrack to her salvation. Two men force open the heavy wooden door and rush to her aid. But relief quickly turns to desperation as they begin to question her about the location of another spy, a traitor who has been feeding vital information to the Nazis.

By the way, did we mention we're playing a real-time strategy game?

Strange as it may seem for an RTS, *R.U.S.E.* comes equipped with a full-on narrative: You fill the combat boots of U.S. Army Major Joe Sheridan—an Ivy League drop-out who works his way up the chain of command over the course of the war—and tour through every major western European front of World War II. You'll even oversee a few historically significant battles like Operation Market Garden and the D-Day invasion at Normandy. In all, the campaign offers a substantial 23 missions, which should amount to nearly 15 hours worth of gameplay, according to the developer.



Enemy is using radio silence

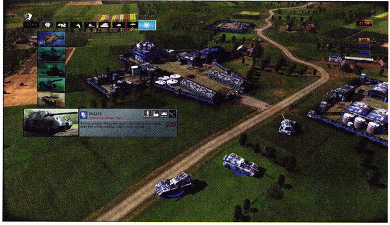
GRASSHOPPER destroyed

↖ Multiplayer options should be extensive, ranging from one-on-one play up to four teams of two.

In addition to allowing you to experience WWII from a unique tactical perspective, the campaign functions as an extended, intensive tutorial. One mission we conquered during our playtest forced us to defend a small encampment from a wave of enemy tanks. Unfortunately, there were five paths into the camp but only three anti-tank guns, which subtly taught us that the precise and thoughtful placement of units is a key to survival in *R.U.S.E.* Of course, when intermittent blasts of tank fire accompany a sweeping musical score and you're frantically dispatching infantry to defend your anti-tank batteries, you barely even notice that you're learning.

Boot camp

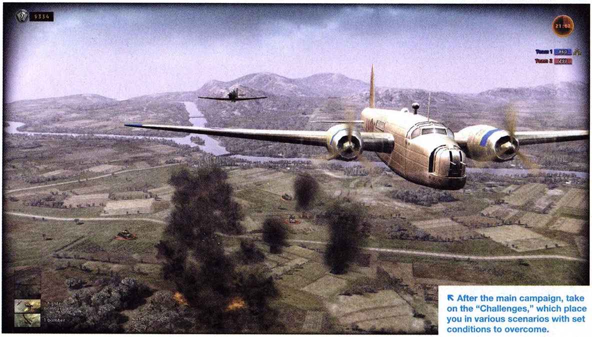
But why encourage such an extensive learning process? Well, because *R.U.S.E.* heavily emphasizes the strategy portion of the real-time strategy genre. Much like chess, the game is more about your ability to rapidly make decisions and develop clever plans—specifically, which units to place where and when—rather than



your ability to point and click quickly (though your opponent's actions will still force you to act fast).

In fact, contrary to the clumsy control schemes of most console RTSs, *R.U.S.E.* feels relatively straightforward: the dual analog sticks steer the camera around the stunningly large and detailed maps (which feels a bit awkward at first, but should eventually become second nature) and a simple drag-and-drop system takes care of nearly all of your troop movement. Your units are largely autonomous—attacking nearby enemies and even healing themselves without specific instructions—so you don't have to worry about micromanaging the action.

Instead, you can focus on implementing all that strategy you spent the entire campaign learning. By the time you graduate to multiplayer (and possibly in the later campaign missions), you'll no longer be tasked with specific objectives. Rather, you'll be able to control a battle from start to finish by building a base, selecting which units to produce, keeping supply lines (and with them, your income) flowing, researching higher level units, spying on your opponent, and controlling every friendly squad in the field. And unlike the game's early missions, a running score that's based on several factors (including the number of units destroyed and bases captured) determines the outcome—requiring every risk to be a carefully calculated one.

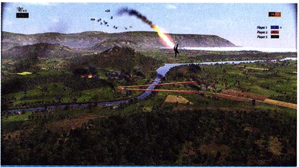


↖ After the main campaign, take on the "Challenges," which place you in various scenarios with set conditions to overcome.

Lie, cheat, steal

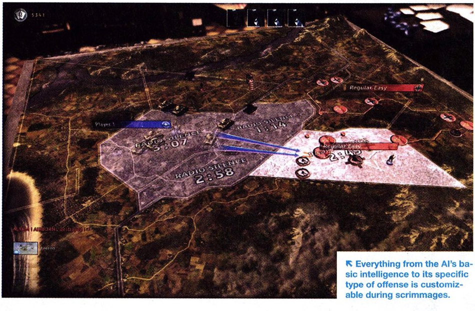
You'll also be able to put the titular R.U.S.E. cards to creative use. Basically, each card offers a different temporary benefit—like revealing the planned path of your opponent's troops or camouflaging your building so the enemy doesn't know what you're building—adding a little poker to the chess game. Want to set up decoy tanks to draw out your enemy and then ambush him with speed-enhanced infantrymen? (Hint: yes, you do.) There are 10 cards in total, but you can use only two at a time in any given sector of the map and your ability to play cards must recharge over time.

We had a hard time deciphering and absorbing everything that was happening during our first real match, but even without the benefit of single-player training, we were able to stumble our way to victory. So naturally, we're looking forward to going on the offensive once *R.U.S.E.* becomes fully operational. | Scott Butterworth

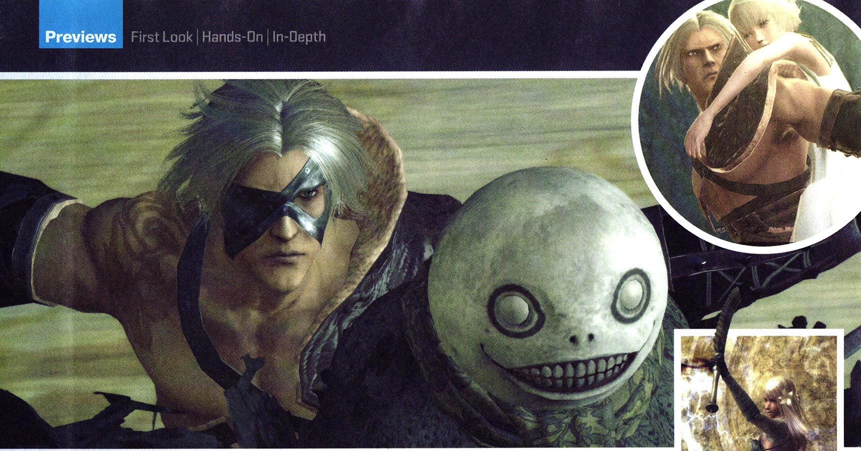


↑ Battlefield

Not to be hyperbolic, but the maps in *R.U.S.E.* are mind-blowing. Powered by the custom-built IrisZoom engine, every battlefield is not only vast but *dense*, and you can actually zoom in to enjoy all the detail. But it's not just there to look pretty: you can use different terrains to your advantage, and the size of the maps makes early intelligence more meaningful since you can potentially counter your opponent's strategy before he even makes it to your side of the map.



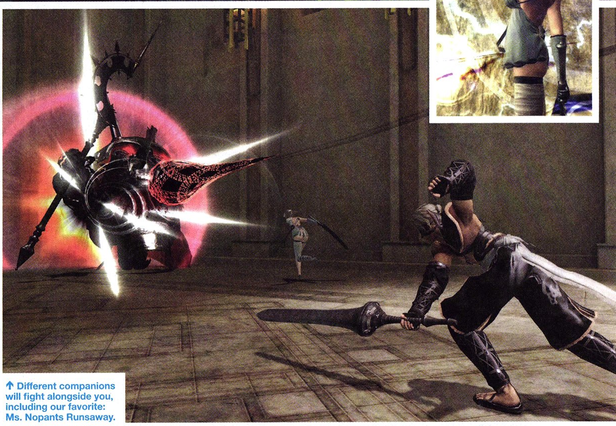
↖ Everything from the AI's basic intelligence to its specific type of offense is customizable during scrimmages.



NIER

Strange name, stranger game

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** Spring **GENRE:** Action RPG
PUBLISHER: Square Enix **DEVELOPER:** cavia



↑ Different companions will fight alongside you, including our favorite: Ms. Nopants Runsaway.

Forget everything you *think* you know about *Nier*. Forget, for example, your incorrect notion that it's a Japanese take on *God of War*. *Nier* is definitely not a pure action game.

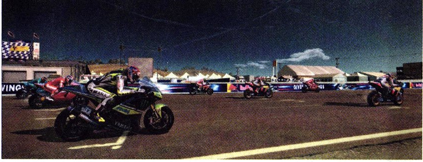
So now you know what *Nier* isn't. That's the easy part. But what exactly is it?

That's where it gets tricky. Yes, *Nier's* an action RPG. You've got hit points and magic—and you hit things and use magic. And yes, it's a Square-published game, which means it has an epic storyline (something about a disease called Black Scrawl ruining civilization, and your personal battle to save your daughter Yonah...which, we assume, also dovetails nicely with saving the world). Beyond that, *Nier* aims to surprise you at every turn.

Take the opening scene. You're in a near-future world wracked by the vile epidemic. And you're arguing with... a sentient book. The color palette: oppressive grays, with painterly strokes of deep red that sweep across the scene whenever you hit one of the Shades, the techno-zombies that now menace the Earth. After thwacking through some simple battles using a lead pipe and your newly acquired magic (which, along with dodge and other moves, can be mapped to your shoulder buttons for quick access), the scene changes and...

You're 1300 years in the future. But you wake in a quaint house in a fairytale medieval village, and the world is now saturated with bright greens and rich browns. While in your house, the perspective shifts to mimic a 2D platformer—and at other times, we're told, the perspective will shift to a top-down view. It's all part of the developer's goal to keep you guessing about what might come next.

Consider us intrigued. We already like the bizarre interaction between titular character Nier and his wisecracking book (named Grimoire Weiss). We also dig the unique customization system, which lets you attach over 100 acquirable *words* to your weapons, skills, and magic. And we're still scratching our heads over the time shift to the far future (which looks like the distant past). We also witnessed one epic boss battle, and muddled through a minor quest to find mutton for the hungry townsfolk. We have no idea how it'll all come together, but we're looking forward to more surprises from *Nier*. | Gary Steinman



MOTOGP 09/10

Race for your rep

PS3 AVAILABLE Summer GENRE Racing PUBLISHER Capcom DEVELOPER Monumental Games

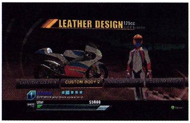
> “The higher your rep, the more money you can earn, regardless of how you place.”

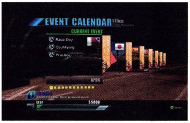
When it comes to racing games, some people are only content with first place, while others are happy to just get their vehicle across the finish line. *MotoGP*, however, requires a special kind of racing enthusiast—and we're not talking about those who prefer two wheels instead of four. We mean the kind of fan who avidly follows the real MotoGP season and understands that getting ninth place isn't something to be unhappy about.

MotoGP has always aimed to be the most realistic motorcycle racer, and now *09/10* seeks to bring that same depth to the off-track activities. In addition to the usual Championship mode, the newly revamped Career mode offers the most comprehensive experience of any of its predecessors. We began our playtest by naming our team, then choosing our home track, home country, and bike manufacturer (we went with Yamaha) from one of the many real-world manufacturers. Then, we hit the track.

The first thing we noticed: the controls felt stiff. It took a couple of hours for us to learn how to steer our bike reasonably well and brake at the appropriate time. And braking is key, because there's often one fastest way to go around a track (known as “the line”); miss the line, and you're likely to fall far behind. Once we loosened up a bit, though, we made sure to pop a few wheelies and wave to the crowd—not just to showboat, but to boost our reputation, which is almost as important as winning itself. The higher your rep, the more money you can earn, regardless of how you place. After racing, we used our cash to begin the process of hiring and managing a staff: engineers to maintain and upgrade the components of our bike, and press officers to manage our image and help us get new sponsorships.

If the stresses of managing your sponsors and desperately trying to not finish in 18th place begin to gnaw at you, the Arcade mode provides a quick hit of fun as you race against others and the ticking timer. It's pleasantly reminiscent of an old coin-op arcade racer, where each checkpoint gives you just enough time to skirt failure by hitting that next checkpoint. | David Murphy





↑ Weather conditions and racer stats follow the real 2009 MotoGP season.

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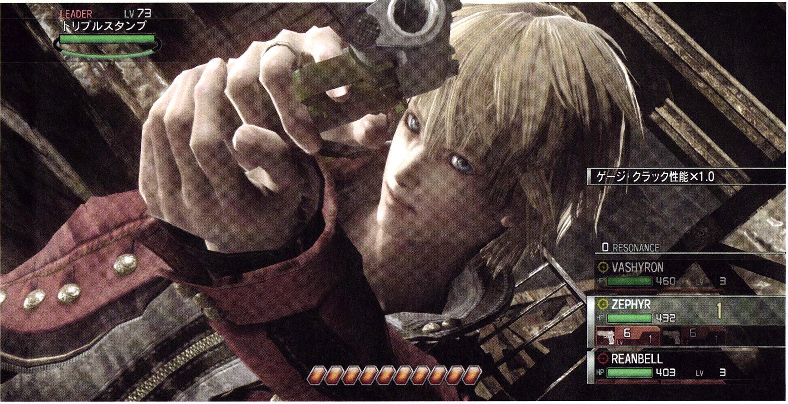
← The 2010 season will be updated through free DLC.



RESONANCE OF FATE

The Japanese RPG is about to become armed and dangerous

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** March **GENRE:** RPG **PUBLISHER:** Sega **DEVELOPERS:** tri-Ace

We want to make intense action for people who can't play action games so well." *Resonance of Fate* director Takayuki Suguro is telling us about his ambitious goal for his game. "Most RPGs aren't focused on the types of 'cool action moments' that other games are," he continues. "We wanted to bring this sort of element to our title."

It's a goal that countless others have tried with only limited success. But developer tri-Ace has always done things its own way, and its newest RPG is no different. From its unique new combat system to its wholesale eschewal of "fantasy" archetypes—swords, magic, elven whimsy, and the like—the game breaks new ground for the developer and, in many ways, the genre itself.

Resonance of Fate is set on Earth in the far future: the planet has been nearly decimated by generations of relentless human pollution, and a tower that stretches miles into the sky provides the only refuge for its citizens. Of course, that tower creates its own class wars and economic strata, with the destitute at the bottom while the affluent count their money and eat their gold-wrapped chocolates high in the sky. As one might expect, machines do most of the work for this future society; many of them have started to break down, however, and the tower is beginning to show other cracks.

Beyond the obvious environmental politics, the story also embraces themes of cultural brainwashing. "You shouldn't believe everything you hear and read," Suguro smiles.

Way of the gun

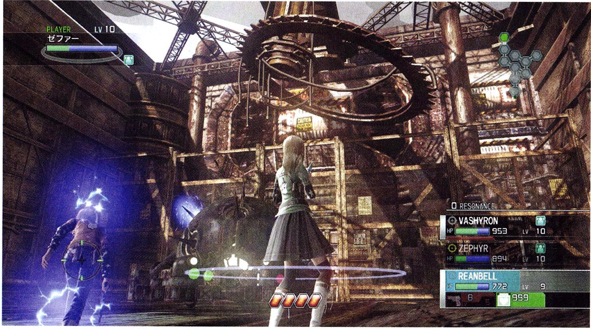
Onto this ideological foundation, the game projects its dramatic tension: You take control of three bounty hunters, with the task of finding and destroying the threats that haunt the tower. In true JRPG form, at the heart of the experience is a hub system where you acquire missions, purchase items, and rest your weary bones.

Where the game departs from the standard JRPG is its emphasis on guns, and the entirely new system in which all of its gun-centric combat takes place. "Normally, RPG developers use much more resources on their cutscenes than their battle scenes," says Suguro. "We wanted to do the opposite." A mix of turn-based and real-time action, battles also aren't random: You won't be attacked until you start to move toward an enemy (letting you plan where and how to attack), and a complex system of direct (permanent) damage and scratch (healable) damage is expanded by combo modifiers and charge attacks (the closer you are to your target, the faster the gauge fills). It's all very dynamic and interrelated, and goes deeper in many ways than the systems of its RPG forebears.

Triple threat

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these battles, however, is something tri-Ace calls Invincible attacks. Essentially, these let you determine your character's path across the

> “Normally, RPG developers use much more resources on their cutscenes than their battle scenes. We wanted to do the opposite.”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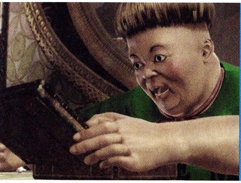
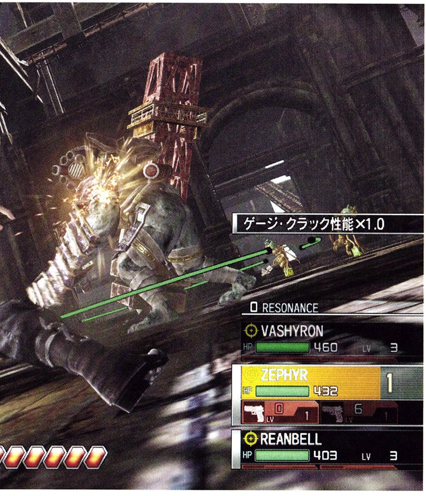


← Pater

In a game of sleek, fashionable gunfighters, this chubby little oddity might seem a bit out of place. The man-child known as Pater is, in fact, from a ruling class—a high-society background. He has a crush on one of your characters (we won't tell you which), and pulls out all the stops in his seduction. “As you can guess, he's a friendly, nice guy, and plays a fairly important role in the story,” says Suguro. And now you know the game has a sense of humor. Just wait until you see the way his poufy hair bounces...

4
ゲージ・クラック性能×7.0
VASHYRON
ZEPHYR
REANBELL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0 RESONANCE
VASHYRON HP 460 LV 3
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ENEMY LV 36
ゲージ・クラック性
1 RESONANCE
VASHYRON 460
ZEPHYR 432
REANBELL

battlefield using a triangulated “line of assault”: As he or she runs along the path, you can manually launch as many strikes as possible before reaching the end of the line by repeatedly tapping the attack button. The result is some spectacularly cinematic action, with characters flipping, diving, sliding, and slap-chopping their way across the area, juggling enemies with well-timed bursts of gunfire.

The challenge is to plan and organize your attacks in such a way that all three heroes surround an enemy, triggering a magnificent Resonance attack, which has all the characters striking the enemy simultaneously. It all looks and feels very much like an over-the-top action game—titles like *Devil May Cry* and *Ninja Gaiden* come to mind. But the devil here is in the details: The complex layers of strategy mixed with a bit of buttonmashing makes the experience *feel* remarkably like real-time combat, while preserving the strategic implications and accessibility of turn-based mechanics. It may still be too complex for your dear old granny to wrap her brain around, but it's infinitely less demanding in terms of hand-eye coordination than a traditional action game. | Evan Shamoon

BRINK

On the precipice of change

PS3 AVAILABLE: Fall GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PUBLISHER: Bethesda Softworks DEVELOPERS: Splash Damage

Note to developers: please stop making first-person shooters. Or at least don't make any more unless you've got something genuinely new to bring to the party. Give us a twist on the genre, like *Borderlands* does with its deep RPG elements, or *MAG* with its super-sized 256-player battles.

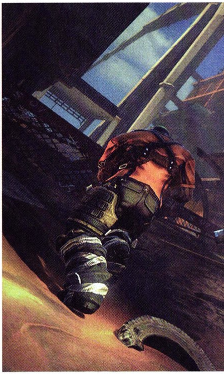
Brink's big idea is that it's going to blur the line between online and offline play, teach players how to tackle non-linear objectives (more fun than it sounds), and completely change the way you move around in a first-person game. So, a fairly ambitious "to do" list then. Developer Splash Damage must be feeling confident, because it's agreed to give us the world exclusive first hands-on.

Don't mention Waterworld

It's the future, the world's a big old mess, and you're living on an isolated floating city called The Ark. In addition to having no decent restaurants, The Ark is being torn apart by two rival factions. The Security are the resident law enforcers, kitted out in body armor and sexy blue uniforms. They're trying to prevent the other side—the Resistance, a band of tattooed crustafarians—from shooting their way out of the fish-bothering city.

Neither team is good or bad (one man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter), but in this scenario we're playing as the Security, which ideologically makes for a better fit given our kill-all-hippies ethos. The first thing to acclimatize to when playing is the way the game cascades objectives dependant on what class you've chosen—engineer, operative, soldier, or medic—and what's currently occurring elsewhere on the battlefield.

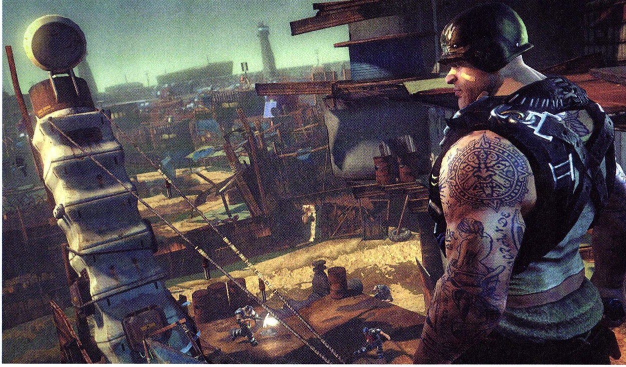
The objectives, each of which carries an XP reward commensurate with its difficulty, are selected from a radial menu on the fly. So, if you're a medic you might decide to dash across the map to revive a teammate in exchange for 100 XP, while an operative might opt to interrogate a downed enemy for the same fee. Other objectives are tied into specific goals that need to be completed in sequence in order to finish the level.

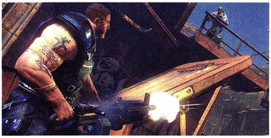


Paid to play

Although *Brink* can be played entirely offline, with AI occupying the other 15

← Despite being able to handle the pain of all his custom tattoos, Bobo still needs band-aids for those pesky boo-boos.





↗ Don't be scared of online battles. *Brink* makes it easy.

↙ See something that needs doing? Change your objective on the fly.

player slots, that's not the ideal way to experience this game. In fact, *Brink* will even bribe you with XP points for going online. Why? Because this team—which was born in the PC FPS mod scene—knows how much fun a deep, objective-based shooter can be when played with like-minded, hair-triggered friends.

Teams with a balanced collection of character classes will be key, and to ensure you don't all pick the same type, the game will bribe you again. Say the main objective requires an engineer to dismantle a barricade, but there aren't any on the team, you'll be offered double XP to swap classes. Meanwhile, teammates will be offered similar XP bounties to keep you alive while you tend to the barricade.

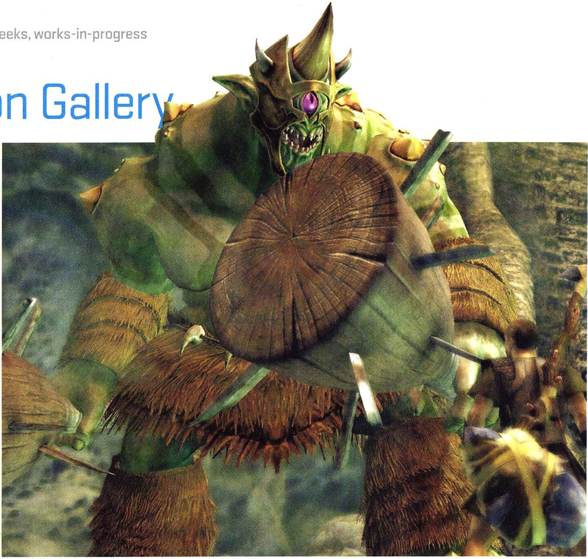
Feeling perky

Earning XP, and consequently leveling up, unlocks a range of weapon upgrades and perk-style upgrades for the different character classes. So later level medics will be able to self-resurrect, while advanced operatives will be able to use the viciously funny sticky bombs. Certain abilities will unlock across all classes, including being able to choose the "heavy" body type.

In *Brink* you can play as an S-, M-, or L-size character: the malnourished types can scamper over tall obstacles at the expense of using big guns; the normal sizers are the all-arounders; while fat boys will have access to heavy machine guns but possess less mobility. The game's other key innovation is called SMART—an acrostic for Smooth Movement Across Random Terrain. Although it's not entirely clear what's "random" about painstaking map design, the upshot is that you can move about *Mirror's Edge*-style, sliding under gaps and clambering over obstacles—all by tapping one button.

Playing *Brink,* then, feels unlike any other shooter. The surprising thing, offline at least, was how *online* it still seemed. Death can come from anywhere, rather than enemies popping out of scripted locations like Whac-A-Mole with SMGs. There's a lot to get used to—from the rapidly switching objectives, to using power-boosting buffs on teammates weapons, and calling for a health-reviving syringe when you're downed—so the experience proves slightly overwhelming initially. What's clear, though, is that from the stylish art design to the punchy weaponry and addictive XP harvesting, *Brink* has the potential to bring a genuinely new flavor to the FPS scene. | James Coates

PlayStation Gallery



Clash of the Titans

PS3 AVAILABLE: March GENRE: Action
PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai
DEVELOPER: Game Republic

Releasing alongside this spring's *Clash of the Titans* movie remake, the game puts you in the role of Greek hero Perseus as he faces off against mythological beasts like the Cyclops and Scorpius. The game expands upon the film's storyline and features an additional 80 enemy types to battle. Think *God of War* but without the gore. | David Murphy

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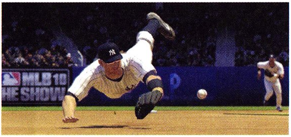
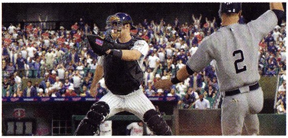




MLB 10 The Show

PS3 AVAILABLE: March GENRE: Sports
PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: SCEA San Diego

Like the Yankees, the perennial champion *Show* franchise doesn't rebuild, it reloads. On deck for the 2010 season is a new Catcher mode that lets you play the field general by calling pitches and their location, while the popular Road to the Show mode adds pitching and fielding development to its lineup. Fans will appreciate the addition of the Home Run Derby to the All-Star festivities, and true fanatics will lose themselves in the Franchise mode that now supports up to 30 players. Online playability is also slated for an upgrade, with a renewed focus on lag-free performance and full-season leagues which require you to set pitching rotations and deal with player injuries. PS2 owners will be glad to hear they're still considered part of the league, and there's a PSP version for those who want their *Show* on the go. | Roger Burchill

Green Day: Rock Band

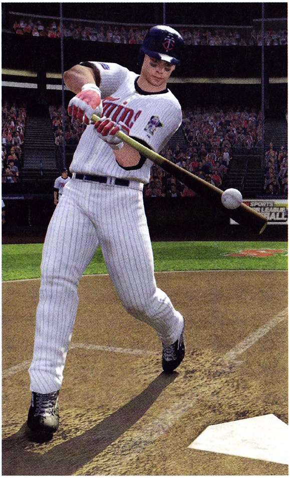
PS3 **AVAILABLE:** TBD 2010 **GENRE:** Music **PUBLISHER:** EA, MTV Games **DEVELOPER:** Harmonix

The Beatles are one tough act to follow, but Green Day's singer/guitarist Billie Joe Armstrong is more than ready to jump on stage as the second group to get the full-game *Rock Band* treatment. "We're excited to now be working on a game spanning our entire career," he tells us. "We want people to fire this up, choose their favorite Green Day tracks, and play along with us as *Rock Band* avatars so they can feel what it's like to perform on stage as Green Day." | Scott Butterworth

MLB 2K10

PS3 **AVAILABLE:** March **GENRE:** Sports
PUBLISHER: 2K Sports
DEVELOPER: Visual Concepts

Talk about rivalries: If *MLB 10* is the Yankees, *MLB 2K10* is the Red Sox. Last year, the *2K* series made a serious run at the pennant by highlighting baseball's core battle between pitcher and batter. Improved versions of Total Control Pitching and Total Control Hitting in *2K10* emphasize the power/control challenges for the pitcher and situational batting challenges for the hitter. But knowledge is as important as your in-game performance: A new Pitch Tell system helps the batter identify pitches during the delivery motion, and Inside Edge scouting reports break down player strengths, weaknesses, and tendencies. Is *2K10's* emphasis on baseball IQ enough to dethrone the reigning champ? Anything's possible come Opening Day. | Roger Burchill



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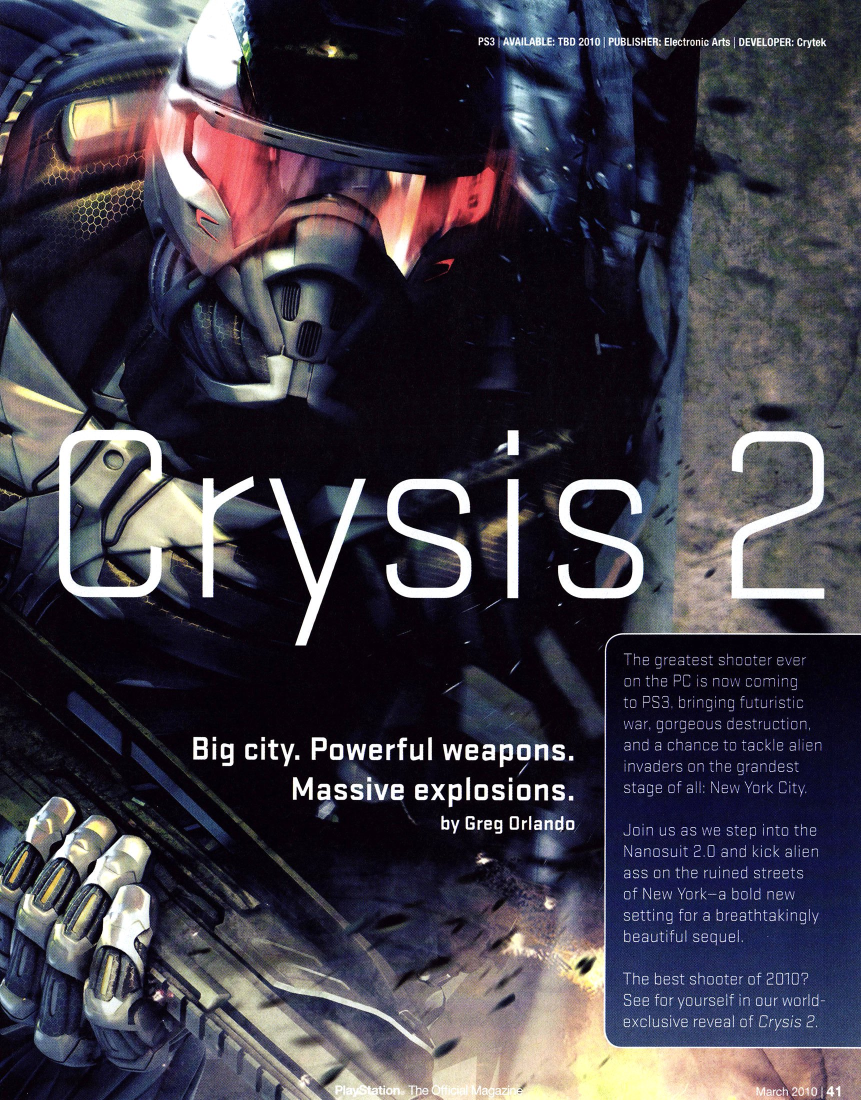
PS3 | **AVAILABLE:** TBD 2010 | **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts | **DEVELOPER:** Crytek



Crysis 2

Big city. Powerful weapons. Massive explosions.

by Greg Orlando

The greatest shooter ever on the PC is now coming to PS3, bringing futuristic war, gorgeous destruction, and a chance to tackle alien invaders on the grandest stage of all: New York City.

Join us as we step into the Nanosuit 2.0 and kick alien ass on the ruined streets of New York—a bold new setting for a breathtakingly beautiful sequel.

The best shooter of 2010? See for yourself in our world-exclusive reveal of *Crysis 2*.

If humanity is to make any kind of stand, it'll have to be amid the wreckage of New York.

We will not die today," *Crysis 2's* trailer proclaims.

Today would be an eminently crappy day to die. Outside, it's a winter wonderland, cold as a Swede's freezer and barely—just barely—snowing. People are on the streets of Frankfurt, Germany, jostling one another as they shop, stuffing their faces, and drinking delightfully alcoholic libations in the city's famous outdoor market.

Inside, in Crytek's headquarters, the trailer is counting down from 20 million. Twenty million, for the record, is the presumed population of New York City in 2023. They have returned, the trailer says, and they've brought destruction with them. "They" are aliens. They are hell-bent on humanity's destruction. They have chosen Manhattan.

The conflict began with *Crysis,* a beloved but, sadly, PC-exclusive adventure. *Crysis* dropped players into the role of an armored, nanosuit-wearing U.S. soldier battling North Koreans and aliens, and won a devoted following for both its powerful, PC-busting graphics and emphasis on creative gameplay. Next came *Crysis Warhead,* an expansion pack that told the story from a different perspective.

Consider *Crysis 2* a relaunch of sorts. It's the first game in the series to come to home consoles, and is being built with the new Crytek 3 game engine, which the developers claim can power such graphical fineries as a realistic day-and-night cycle and destruction that's not precalculated, but rather generated as the bullets are flying. It also shifts the war from *Crysis'* more pastoral setting to an urban jungle. Perhaps most important, it features the Nanosuit 2.0, an awesomely powerful weapon and intelligence-gathering tool that allows its wearer to run at great speeds, perform superhuman leaps and incredible feats of strength, resist injury, and maneuver silently through decimated battlefields.

BITE THE APPLE

"New York City stands out as the pride of mankind," Crytek's CEO Cevat Yerli says. "If aliens can harm New York, they can harm all of Earth." Conversely, Yerli says, if humanity is to make any kind of stand, it'll have to be amid the wreckage of New York.

Alien occupation has wrecked the city, creating what the developer calls "catastrophic beauty." Amid the rubble and scorched earth, remnants of technology and the natural world (fueled by environmentally friendly green initiatives) intermix freely. The urban jungle is not figurative here, and it's a battlefield where you're free to plot your own tactics.

SECOND VERSE, SAME AS THE FIRST?

The original *Crysis* starred Jake Dunn, aka Nomad, a U.S. Delta Force soldier, and offered a three-way skirmish between Dunn's Raptor team, a newly invigorated North Korean army, and an enigmatic alien race. Set on a series of fictitious islands, *Crysis* was the first title in a planned trilogy.

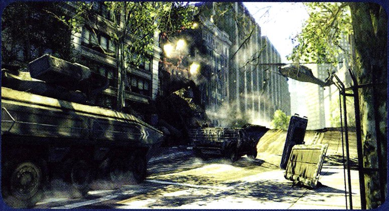
Crysis Warhead was set during the same conflict as the first game, but this time from the perspective of Psycho, a former British operative. This was a side-story instead of a direct sequel, and again featured the North Koreans and aliens as the game's foes.

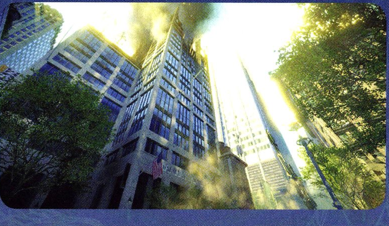
Crytek won't say if either Dunn or Psycho returns for the sequel. Cryptically, all Cevat Yerli will say on the matter is, "We have an interesting spin on that."

The city's ruins create vistas, strategic points where you can perform reconnaissance and gather intelligence. "The world is living without you," the game's executive producer Nathan Camarillo says. "You can look at the city and see its plot elements. You have to build a story in the allotted space."

The nanosuit allows expression in the deadliest ways imaginable. You're free to shift among its four modes, allowing access to superhuman abilities that are both active and passive. Crytek hasn't exactly nailed down the names for these modes, but each is based on your intent rather than a series of powers. Infiltration mode, with its camouflage and noise-dampening elements, allows for subtlety. In combat mode, you can access bursts of speed and superhuman strength for devastating melee attacks. You can assume the role of scout and master planner in tactical mode, wherein enemies and items can be spotted and tagged for later recovery or destruction. In armored mode you can take comfort in added resistance to gunfire.

Crysis 2 will provide hints, but there's no wrong way to play the game. If you're a straightforward type, you can run-and-gun to your heart's content—but Camarillo says you can also go against convention for an additional challenge.





SUITABLE FOR ANY OCCASION

THE CLOTHES *DO* MAKE THE MAN…

The Nanosuit 2.0 won an award from Red Dot Online, an organization that recognizes excellence in all forms of design. "Normally, you only get the award if the design actually exists," Yerli says.

More to the point, the Nanosuit 2.0 is a means by which players can express themselves. It will be wholly possible in *Crysis 2,* say, to express oneself with a metal-encased fist rocketed into the squishy maw of an alien. Switch modes, and players can shift from melee warrior to ass-kicker in the mold of the Predator, using stealth and camouflage to pick off unwary foes.

Even more to the point: Yerli is so confident about the suit that he says players "will miss it in other games."

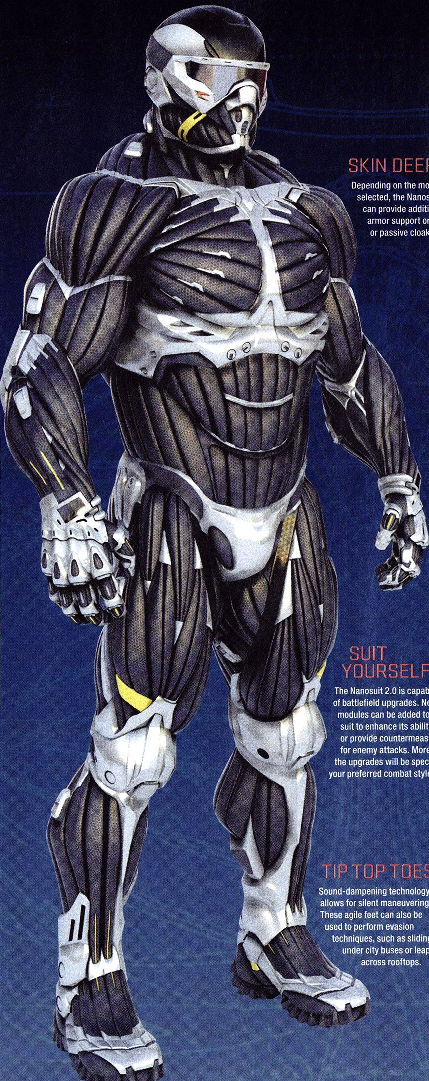
HANDY POWERS

Powers can be used in tandem with one another, allowing for powerful attacks. In combat mode, super-speed and -strength can be combined for an incredibly powerful punch.

DESIGN FEET

"A lot of first-person shooter games don't have feet," Yerli says. "I don't understand that."

It may seem like a throwaway comment, but with Crytek, it's actually revelatory. *Crysis 2's* developer puts immense thought into every little bit of its game, from the seemingly inconsequential (players can look down and see their hero's feet) to the decidedly monumental in the design of New York and the Nanosuit 2.0. This attention to detail won universal acclaim for *Crysis* on the PC, and should pay similar dividends to *Crysis 2* on consoles.



SKIN DEEP

Depending on the mode selected, the Nanosuit 2.0 can provide additional armor support or active or passive cloaking.

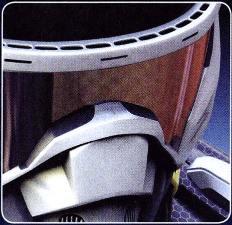
SUIT YOURSELF

The Nanosuit 2.0 is capable of battlefield upgrades. New modules can be added to the suit to enhance its abilities or provide countermeasures for enemy attacks. Moreover, the upgrades will be specific to your preferred combat style.

TIP TOP TOES

Sound-dampening technology allows for silent maneuvering. These agile feet can also be used to perform evasion techniques, such as sliding under city buses or leaping across rooftops.

It will be wholly possible to express yourself with a metal-encased fist rocketed into the squishy maw of an alien.



MIND'S EYE

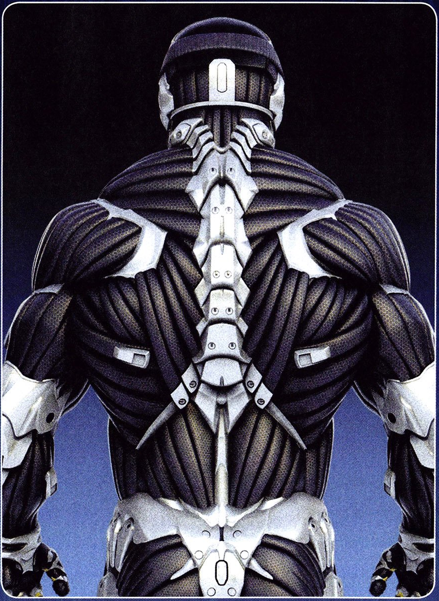
A tactical display allows the Nanosuit to track tagged enemies and guns. It can also access an enemy's armaments.

'ROID RAGE

The Nanosuit's musculature lets its wearer move at super-speed for short periods of time. Super-strength can be accessed to pry apart doors. Leaping ability is greatly augmented, should the user so desire.

HARD CORE

The suit's use of metal is intentional. It's to provide additional protection to sensitive areas and provide additional power without being too cumbersome.



BACK OFF!

"Man, if that hit me, it would really hurt!" Camarillo is showing off the intent-based powers inherent in the Nanosuit 2.0. In this case, the hero is an armored Mike Tyson. The suit combines powers and abilities such as speed and strength or camouflage and sound-dampening for maximum effect. Even when the suit's powers aren't activated, passive features will be in place to ensure players are always in the "role" they've chosen.

An alien ship, critically wounded, punches through a skyscraper, leaving a charred, smoking, and almost circular hole through its center. New York has, once again, taken it on the chin.

The scene is from the third or, perhaps, fourth mission of the game. Crytek has chosen, on this wintry day, to highlight this scenario. It's fairly polished, but the developer is quick to throw out the dynamic duo of caveats, and does so multiple times throughout the presentation: Nothing is finished, and the game is still very early in its development.

No context is given, no protagonist named. You must first meet with a scientist, the tentatively named Nathan Gould, and will later be asked to storm the alien crash site to retrieve some mysterious samples.

The streets of New York are very nearly deserted. There's been a mass evacuation of the citizenry, but a series of armor-clad soldiers are patrolling everywhere. These are operatives of CrynetOps, and they serve as the enemies for this level. "You're not supposed to have the suit," Yerli says mysteriously. This does nothing to explain why the soldiers are attempting to kill the protagonist, possibly ruining the suit in the process. That, however, is a mystery for another time.

Now is the time for catastrophic beauty. The scenario showcased *Crysis 2's* use of light and shadow to throw an ominous pall on alien-held territory. Bridges melted in the conflagration, and trees flattened and curled away from some unforeseen explosion. This type of beautiful wreckage is what *Crysis* did to perfection on PC, and it seems intact on PlayStation 3. For those concerned about Crytek making a PC game and then shoddily and hastily porting a console version, Yerli states development on PS3 is happening simultaneously. "I don't feel we've compromised anything."

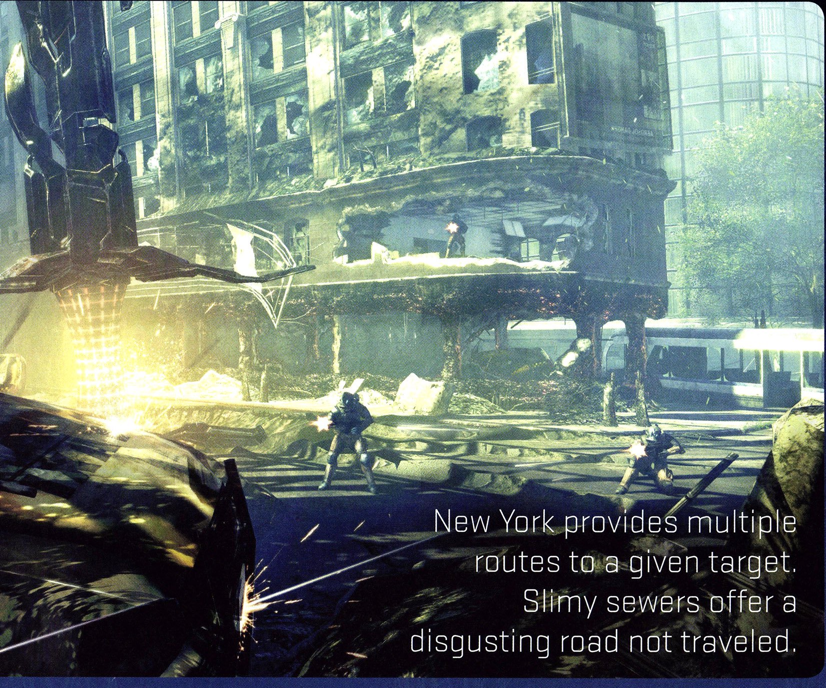
A HELLUVA TOWN

The cutscene gives way to gameplay. Bullets splinter concrete and blood splatters as your hero takes a straightforward combat role. This is strictly run-and-gun stuff, and it comes with its own appropriate aural cues in the form of leaden footsteps and an emphasis on bullets plunking off the suit's enhanced armor. Yerli and Camarillo point out this could also be done in infiltration mode, with you sneaking up toward unwitting foes. Dampened footfalls allow for a sneaky approach, and this mode provides a better opportunity to overhear enemies talking. In this way, additional story elements can be gleaned.

New York provides multiple routes to a given target. Slimy sewers offer a disgusting road not traveled. Wrecked traffic and abandoned food kiosks allow for cover at ground level. Scaffolding and partially wrecked buildings make for excellent climbing. "The idea [here] is not necessarily replayability," Yerli says. Instead, the developer is highlighting player choice and individual play style.

"You are in charge," Camarillo says. He and Crytek eschew the philosophy that a game should throw things at a player. "The world reacts to your plans," he says. This is perfectly acceptable, as the city that never sleeps does not easily suffer fools—and *Crysis* wouldn't be the most intriguing first-person shooter coming down the pike if it was content to rest on the genre's tired conventions.

This emerging *Crysis* demands further scrutiny. ■



New York provides multiple routes to a given target. Slimy sewers offer a disgusting road not traveled.

YERLI UPDATES

Crysis 2's story is still being worked on, but Yerli already has a few factors firmly in his mind. Believable characters are essential to the *Crysis* franchise. "From a story perspective you have to care about the characters," he says. As for the game's aliens, well, Yerli isn't willing to divulge much more about them. Almost nothing was revealed about the game's aliens in the original *Crysis*, and *Crysis 2* may follow suit. "I'm not sure if we have to," he says about explaining the aliens' motivations. "In fact, to truly answer the question would be detrimental."

READY, SET, GO!

Haven't been playing the PSPgo? Check out what you've been missing...

BY ANDREW HAYWARD

Yes, it's been out for a few months now, but we still get the occasional odd look when we gush about this pint-size powerhouse. "What exactly is the PSPgo?" our befuddled friends would ask. Our answer isn't so simple: It's not exactly a new system, but it's certainly not just a simple hardware revision. By ditching the disc drive of previous PSPs, Sony has embraced a new download-only path, which lets gamers fill the device with games, movies, music, and more without ever leaving the couch—though you can certainly do that with this sleek, ultra-portable device.

So whether you're considering your first portable PlayStation or simply pondering a shift to the latest model, we've got you covered with a list of essential games, media, features, and more to make the most of the PSPgo.

BUILT-IN MEMORY Unlike earlier PSPs, the PSPgo has 16GB (gigabytes) of internal memory, which you can load up with dozens of games, plus movies, music, photos, and more.

WI-FI READY Flicking this switch opens your PSP to a world of entertainment, letting you use a Wi-Fi network to download games and media, play online, and even surf the web.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

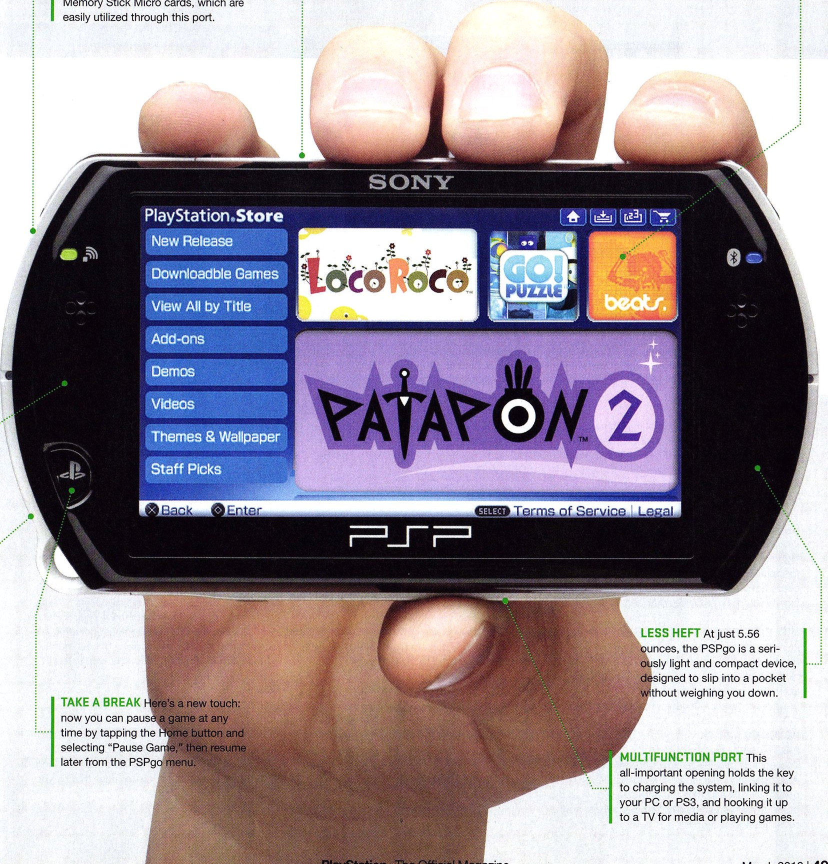
Besides the PSPgo hardware, the system includes a USB cable and AC plug (for charging the internal battery), plus instruction booklets and the MediaGo software disc needed to put your music and video clips on the PSPgo. Additionally, the PSPgo comes with a voucher to download a "lite" version of *Rock Band Unplugged,* which includes five built-in tracks and lets you purchase additional songs from the PlayStation Store.

KNOW YOUR GO:

HOLD TIGHT Don't worry about having this slim device slide out of your hands: thin, rubberized grips on the back make it easy to keep the PSPgo within your grasp.

SLIDING SCREEN Push gently on the base of the screen and you'll reveal most of the PSPgo's input buttons; nudge it back down and the PSPgo regains its slinky, travel-ready shape.

EXPANSION SLOT Should you need more than 16GB of space, you can add up to 16GB more via swappable Memory Stick Micro cards, which are easily utilized through this port.

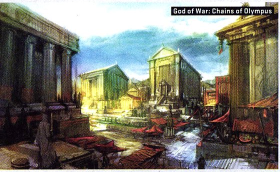

SONY
PlayStation.Store
New Release
Downloadble Games
View All by Title
Add-ons
Demos
Videos
Themes & Wallpaper
Staff Picks
LocoRoco
GO! PUZZLE
beats.
PATAPON 2
Back
Enter
SELECT Terms of Service | Legal
PSP

TAKE A BREAK Here's a new touch: now you can pause a game at any time by tapping the Home button and selecting "Pause Game," then resume later from the PSPgo menu.

LESS HEFT At just 5.56 ounces, the PSPgo is a seriously light and compact device, designed to slip into a pocket without weighing you down.

MULTIFUNCTION PORT This all-important opening holds the key to charging the system, linking it to your PC or PS3, and hooking it up to a TV for media or playing games.

More than 350 PSP games are now available from the PlayStation Store, including smash hits previously released on UMD discs, download-exclusive titles, PSone classics, and bite-sized PSP Minis. We've picked out some of the most essential, can't-miss PSP experiences in each category, from a variety of genres and game styles—but with new titles added every week, you can be sure that many more unique and exciting game experiences are also out there. And don't forget about the dozens of free playable demos available for download.


God of War: Chains of Olympus

Rachet & Clank: Size Matters

Jeanne D'Arc

SONY
PSP
SELECT
START

PSP ESSENTIALS

GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS

Publisher: SCEA | Developer: Ready at Dawn

Chains of Olympus delivers a complete *God of War* experience to the PSP, offering a take on Kratos' early adventures (before the PS2 hits) that maintains the series' epic-scale action and stunningly detailed visuals without compromise.

GRAN TURISMO

Publisher: SCEA | Developer: Polyphony Digital

Handheld simulation-style racers have a new gold standard, thanks to *Gran Turismo's* massive list of licensed, real-life vehicles (more than 800 in total), and—standard for the series—rock-solid racing physics.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: CHINATOWN WARS

Publisher: Rockstar | Developer: Rockstar Leeds

Fight for honor, respect, and a boatload of cash in the latest open-world action entry, which lets you cause havoc in the sprawling fictional metropolis of Liberty City in so many devious (and thrilling) ways.

HOT SHOTS GOLF: OPEN TEE 2

Publisher: SCEA | Developer: Clap Hanz

Hot Shots Golf is accessible but challenging; whimsical yet grounded in reality. *Open Tee 2* delivers even more refined golfing action than its similarly great predecessor, but now with added online play

JEANNE D'ARC

Publisher: SCEA | Developer: Level-5

Tactical role-playing set in 15th-century France? Amazingly it works, and Joan of Arc's tragic quest is a rich and detailed endeavor boosted by colorful visuals, anime-stylized cutscenes, and a rousing original score.

LITTLEBIGPLANET

Publisher: SCEA | Developer: SCE Studio Cambridge

Sony's portable platform-action game maintains all the wit and creativity of the PS3 original, packing in 30 new stages, as well as a level editor that lets you share your own creations with the world.

LOCOROCO 2

Publisher: SCEA | Developer: SCE Japan Studio

Colored, singing blob-like creatures that combine to solve puzzles and various platform challenges? Sounds like a bad trip, but this wonderfully endearing series is one of the best original options on PSP.

MADDEN NFL 10

Publisher: EA Sports | Developer: EA Tiburon

Keep the season alive on PSP with *Madden NFL 10,* which offers online play, all your favorite teams and players, and custom plays that can be created and transferred to the PS3 version.

RATCHET & CLANK: SIZE MATTERS

Publisher: SCEA | Developer: High Impact Games

Screen size clearly doesn't matter here: even without the benefit of a television or PS3, *Ratchet & Clank's* patented blend of platform action, fantastical weaponry, and sidesplitting humor simply cannot be overlooked.

RESISTANCE RETRIBUTION

Publisher: SCEA | Developer: Sony Bend

Dig deeper into the narrative of the popular PS3 shooter franchise with this excellent portable spin-off, which features frantic third-person action and five unique online play modes, including Containment and Capture the Flag.

TEKKEN 6

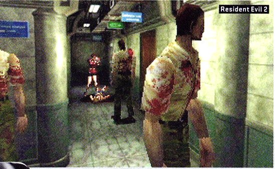
Publisher: Namco Bandai | Developer: Namco Bandai

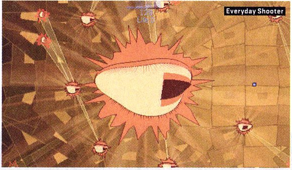
The King of Iron Fist tournament begins anew on PSP, with 40 diverse fighters (including several newcomers), a wide array of new arenas, and all the high-impact combat you loved in previous iterations.

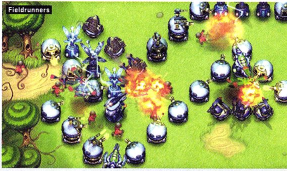
WIPEOUT PULSE

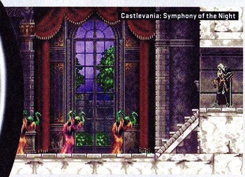
Publisher: SCEA | Developer: Sony Studio Liverpool

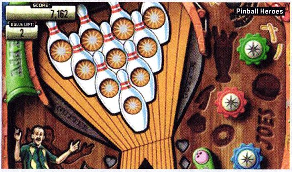
Hovercraft racing reaches its portable apex in *Wipeout Pulse,* which delivers insane speeds on winding courses via various race events, a lengthy campaign mode, and online battles that pit you against the world's best.

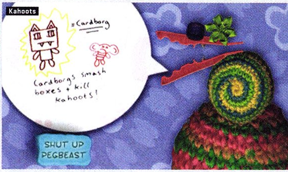












PSONE CLASSICS

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

Publisher: Konami | Developer: Konami

Even as follow-ups have built upon its legacy, *Symphony of the Night* is still widely considered the series' defining entry, and its side-scrolling, castle-exploring gameplay remains incredibly polished and enthralling almost 13 years later.

FINAL FANTASY VII

Publisher: Square Enix | Developer: Square

Square's cinematic role-playing epic expanded the genre like no game before it. Experience all three discs of this sprawling tale via one handy download from the PlayStation Store.

METAL GEAR SOLID

Publisher: Konami | Developer: Konami

Hideo Kojima's stealth-action opus reignited an 8-bit franchise and led to some of the best games on every single PlayStation platform. Don't miss the PSone original—it still holds up amazingly well.

RESIDENT EVIL 2

Publisher: Capcom | Developer: Capcom

Surviving the burning, zombie-infested Raccoon City made an indelible mark on gamers back in 1998, and the nightmares continue (in a good way) on the PlayStation Store. *Resident Evil* and *RE3* are also available.

PSN EXCLUSIVES

EVERYDAY SHOOTER

Publisher: SCEA | Developer: Queasy Games

Developed largely by a single indie programmer, *Everyday Shooter* is a sparkling lo-fi, arcade-style shooter that shakes things up by offering fresh gameplay mechanics and distinct aesthetics in each memorable, passing stage.

PATAPON 2

Publisher: SCEA | Developer: Pyramid/SCE Japan Studio

Action? Strategy? Rhythm? Try all of the above. This strikingly original curiosity lets you guide an army of eyeball-shaped warriors by tapping in various drum commands. Just try to get these songs out of your head.

PIXELJUNK MONSTERS DELUXE

Publisher: SCEA | Developer: Q-Games

Expanded from the PS3 original, *PixelJunk Monsters Deluxe* offers a vibrant, challenging take on the tower defense strategy genre, which finds you building various defensive towers to ward off disparate invaders.

PINBALL HEROES

Developer: SCEA | Publisher: SCE Studios San Diego

Pinball Heroes is notable not just for offering a refined and affordable pinball option for PSP gamers, but also for basing its a la carte tables on popular PlayStation properties like *Uncharted* and *PAIN.*

PSP MINIS

BLAST OFF

Publisher: Halfbrick Studios | Developer: Halfbrick

Guide your rocket and wrangle floating astronauts before you reach the goal, all while being mindful of fuel and planets' gravity. Like the best Minis to date, it's a simple approach at a cheap price.

FIELDRUNNERS

Publisher: Subatomic Studios | Developer: Subatomic

Survive 100 increasingly difficult waves of enemies—including motorcycle-riding grunts and armored helicopters—by building mazes of towers armed with machine guns, rocket launchers, flamethrowers, and other devices of devastation.

KAHOOTS

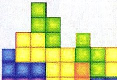
Publisher: Honeyslug | Developer: Honeyslug

Rotating blocks to make a path to the exit provides simple enjoyment in this colorful puzzle-platformer, but *Kahoots'* uniquely goofy presentation—featuring tutorials sung by a hand-sewn "Pegbeast"—makes the more lasting impact.

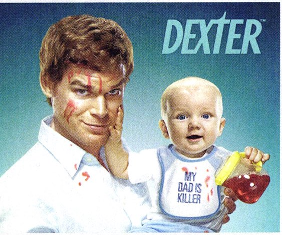
TETRIS

Publisher: Electronic Arts | Developer: Electronic Arts

Tetris hasn't really changed in the last couple of decades, and while this new version brings little new to the table, it offers a simple and affordable way for PSPgo owners to experience the puzzle classic all over again.



Included with your PSPgo is the MediaGo PC software, which lets you easily transfer your existing music, video clips, photos, and other media to your PSPgo. Paired with the PlayStation Store—which offers downloads of hit movies and TV shows, plus game trailers, music, and more—MediaGo offers a world of entertainment that PSPgo users can easily tap into. Here are some of the exciting media options available to PSPgo owners.



The Sensational Spider-Man

WATCH

Movies Watching recent hits like *The Hangover, Star Trek,* and *Up* is as simple as firing up the PlayStation Store and downloading them directly to the PSPgo via a Wi-Fi connection. Additionally, some films can even be rented, letting you fill (and refill) your PSPgo with the latest flicks for just a few bucks at a time.

TV Shows Missed an episode, or looking to start a new series? The PlayStation Store hosts hundreds of popular TV series—such as *30 Rock, South Park, 24,* and *Dexter*—as well as anime shows and sports highlights from the NBA, MLB, and UFC.

Digital Copies DVD and Blu-ray movies are increasingly released with packed-in digital copies, which you can easily transfer to your PSPgo via MediaGo and watch over and over again while you're on the run.

Game Videos Check out the latest and greatest PSP and PS3 games via a bevy of free video trailers available in the PlayStation Store, or grab episodes of Sony's PULSE video series, which spotlights the hottest new PlayStation Store additions.

Video Podcasts MediaGo's Podcast Directory lets you search for and subscribe to a variety of recurring video podcasts, with subjects ranging from videogames and technology to news, sports, and fitness. But don't feel limited by what's in the directory. Search around—the Internet is filled with something that's sure to suit your unique tastes.

READ

Comic Books Keep up with your favorite superheroes by downloading digital comic books from the PlayStation Store. Headliners include *Iron Man*, *The Sensational Spider-Man*, *Transformers*, and *X-Men: Age of Apocalypse.* You'll also find several Disney books suitable for the young'uns.

RSS Channel PSPgo's RSS Channel feature makes it easier to keep up with your favorite blogs and websites. Just click the "RSS" link or button on a website, then confirm the prompt that follows to add it to the channel.

Books Bored reading those musty old literary classics? Everything's better on the PSPgo! Just use the built-in web browser and search for "PSP eBooks"; you'll find a bevy of freely available options, including *The Art of War* and *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

30 Rock

The Hangover

Metal Gear Solid

SONY
Star Trek
PSP

LISTEN

Music Import your existing music collection or rip your CDs with MediaGo, then listen to it on the PSPgo with the option to use a handful of vibrant music visualizers. Some games (including *Gran Turismo)* even let you use custom soundtracks while playing!

Podcasts As with video podcasts, MediaGo's podcast directory holds the key to numerous different shows, though many of your favorite websites and personalities likely have their own regular podcasts. Check out our sister website GamesRadar's weekly podcast, TalkRadar, for occasional appearances by PTOM staffers!

Internet Radio Hit the Internet Radio option under Network on the XMB to download a free player, then choose from dozens of themed stations to fill your PSPgo's speakers with free, streaming music.

Audiobooks Paperbacks might seem outmoded with a PSPgo in hand, but you can still enrich your mind with downloadable audiobooks. Amazon.com and Borders.com both sell scads of digital audiobooks that can be imported to the PSPgo via MediaGo.

Game Music If you're in the mood for game music, you can even snag free songs from PSP titles like *LocoRoco 2, Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror,* and *The Con* from the PlayStation Store.

SONY
SONY
Media Go
PSP

SONY
Gran Turismo
104
PSP

HOOK IT UP

If you have both a PSPgo and a PlayStation 3 and haven't linked the two, you're missing out on some seriously cool features. First up is Remote Play, which lets you play select PS3 games on your PSP from anywhere via a Wi-Fi connection. And if you still have classic PSone game discs, pop them in your PS3 and you can play those via Remote Play too.

Another sweet feature that comes courtesy of a connected PlayStation 3 is adhocParty, a free download for the PS3 that lets you play local wireless PSP games (like *Gran Turismo* and *Dissidia: Final Fantasy)* online over the Internet. Multiplayer matches previously relegated to your immediate vicinity now span the continent (and beyond) with adhocParty and a PS3.

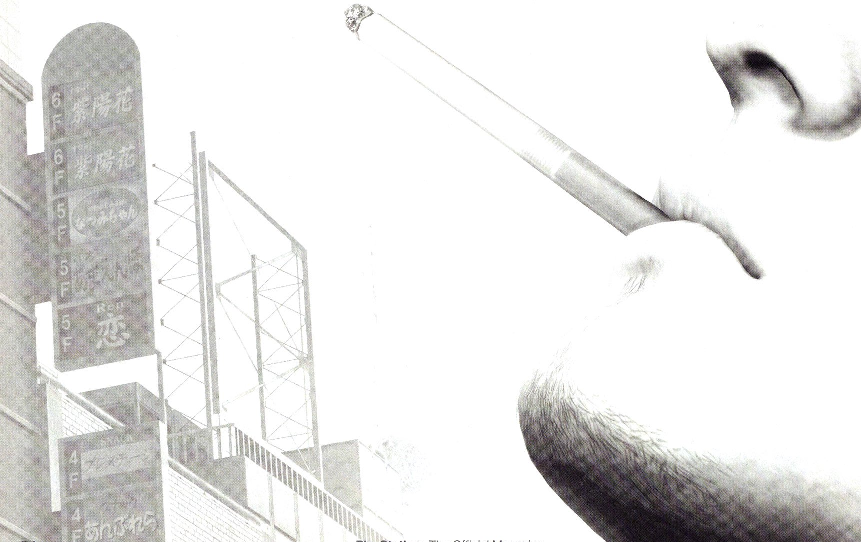
Finally, if you're a PS3 nut and can't shake the sensation of having a DualShock 3 in your hands while gaming, you can actually play the PSPgo using a PS3 controller. You'll need to connect both the device and controller to your PlayStation 3 using separate USB cables, then hit the Bluetooth Device Settings option on the PSPgo to recognize the controller, and you're all set! Take it a step further by grabbing the PSPgo component video cable, which lets you easily play PSP games on your television.

YAKUZA

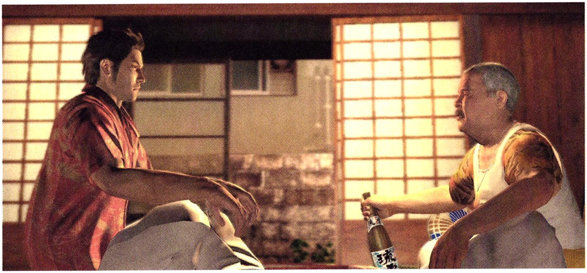
Konichiwa, Gangsta

We travel deep into the dark underbelly of Tokyo to unveil *Yakuza 3*. Find out why it might be Japan's answer to *Grand Theft Auto.*

BY EVAN SHAMOON


6F 紫陽花
6F 紫陽花
5F なつみちゃん
5F あまえんぼ
5F Ren 恋
4F フルステージ
4F あんぷれら

3



We're walking around the streets of Tokyo's infamous Kabukicho district, and the criminal element couldn't be more palpable if it slithered right up and robbed us at knifepoint. Men in sharp suits and pointy shoes smoke cigarettes and joke loudly with one another outside buildings, their vibrant red and immaculately gelled hair, and pasty, cracked skin making each look remarkably like the next. Their job is to get people from down here into the rooms upstairs, where prostitutes—whose profession is essentially legal in this part of the city—lay in waiting. The prices, we're told, vary wildly.

Elsewhere, dubious-looking men sidle up to passers-by, chatting them up as they walk. Some of them peddle drugs—meth, coke, and heroin are all big business here—while others push their illegal betting operations. The crowds on the street are invariably mixed, from groups of primped and preened schoolgirls in uniform, to Japanese businessmen, to befuddled foreigners wanting a piece of the action. Neon signs buzz overhead, and the sheer density and speed of the city are amplified by the clatter of footsteps around us.

Maybe it's our full-body tattoo, or the fact that we're built like a German tank, but it feels like everyone here is staring at us.

BACK TO REALITY

Okay, so we have no full-body tattoos. And believe it or not, we're built like videogame magazine writers. We are, in fact, fresh off the plane and saddled in at Sega's Tokyo headquarters, playing the publisher's upcoming crime drama *Yakuza 3* with Sega producer and studio head Toshihiro Nagoshi. It's easy to mistake a videogame for real life, so don't blame us: *Yakuza's* Kabukicho district—which is called Kamuro-cho in the game, for legal reasons—is modeled almost building for building after the real one in Shinjuku. When we visited the real Kabukicho later that night, we were blown away by the reproduction: We

The plot is like a Japanese version of *The Sopranos,* with rivalries, vicious vendettas, and absurd melodrama.

felt almost as dirty in real life as we did after playing *Yakuza 3.*

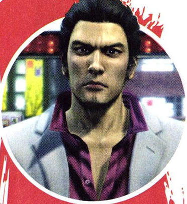
For those new to the series, *Yakuza* is Sega's attempt to bring the Japanese criminal underworld to the small screen. It's a big-budget action-adventure, starring Kazuma Kiryu, the infamous "Dragon of the Dojima Family" (he's the one with the full-on body tattoo). The series' plot is a bit like a Japanese version of *The Sopranos,* with rivalries between crime families, vicious vendettas, and absurd melodrama like you wouldn't believe. It's been an extremely popular series in Japan (as evidenced by the fact that this is the third game in as many years, with a fourth on the way), but the series has been met with somewhat less success in the U.S. And yet the series has managed to build a devoted following here, and news of *Yakuza 3's* release in the States has fans all fired up.

CRIME SCENE

More than any of the prior games, *Yakuza 3* is the best reproduction of modern Japan in videogame form to date. The bars, arcades, vending machines, *convinis* (convenience stores—which, incidentally, put ours to shame), and just about everything else in this world are just so remarkably life-like. The game is still an old-fashioned action-adventure-RPG hybrid in many ways, with lots of time spent wandering around looking for our next objective; to call it a direct descendant of Sega's own Dreamcast game *Shenmue* would be an understatement. But the huge game world feels alive, and this is no small feat: Given the accuracy with which these areas have been modeled, anyone planning a trip to Japan would be well-served with a playthrough of *Yakuza 3.*

While the first game in the series received a full Western makeover—complete with re-recorded English voiceover—*Yakuza 3* will mimic the PS2's *Yakuza 2* and be subtitled, retaining all of the Japanese voices. "We felt this was the best way to convey the feelings delivered in the original dialogue of *Yakuza 3,"* Nagoshi explains. "We did minimize certain parts of the game that would be difficult to understand to people outside of Japan. We think this should make the game play more smoothly as an overall experience."

Mark our words, this adherence to the original acting is indeed a blessing in disguise. On one hand, it's Sega's attempt to cut production costs for an American market that hasn't fully taken to the series. On the other hand, it's absolutely the more authentic approach: As any fan of foreign cinema (or anime) knows, dubbed films generally diminish the grandeur of their original-language counterparts, and the dialogue-heavy *Yakuza 3* is no exception (thanks, in no small part, to the fact that the series uses a star-studded cast).

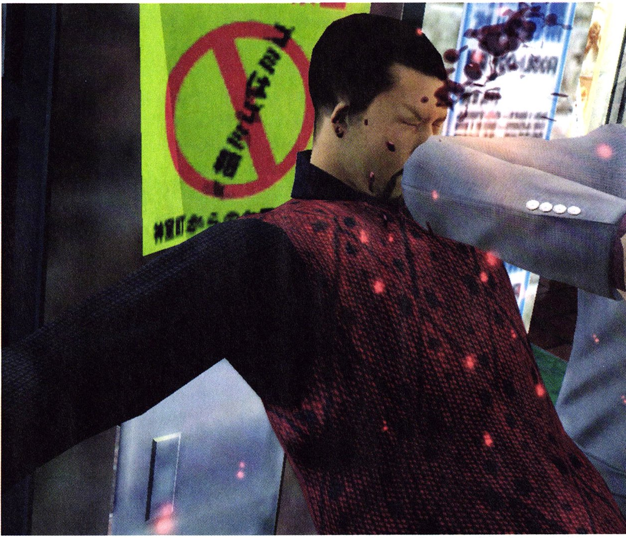


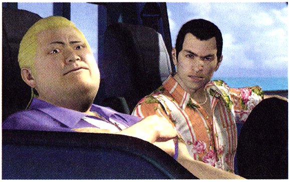
KEEP IT SIMPLE

The *Yakuza* series has always made use of a basic RPG-style leveling system that allows Kazuma to become bigger/stronger/faster, as well as learn more advanced combos. In *Yakuza 3,* the system is more detailed, allowing us to more finely tune our advancement, and to give us access to new moves and weapons as well. But Nagoshi and his team have treaded lightly in this respect: "We've been careful not to make the level up interface overly complicated," he promises.

IN CONTROL

Although *we* say *Yakuza* is more linear than *GTA*, producer Toshihiro Nagoshi reminds us that you'll still be making plenty of choices: "Because you can explore the city and do your own thing if you like, I don't think the Yakuza experience is necessarily linear. Many parts of the story have multiple solutions and the game allows players to have some choice in deciding how and when they want to try to address the challenges. But there *is* an overall storyline to be experienced in the game."





While screenshots of *Yakuza* may recall the likes of *Grand Theft Auto, Yakuza 3,* like its prequels, is in fact a more narrative-driven, somewhat linear experience. "The *Yakuza* series plays more like a movie or book," says Nagoshi of his magnum opus. "Movies and books have a set story and pacing at which story elements unfold. I'd say the biggest difference [between *Yakuza* and *Grand Theft Auto]* is the stronger emphasis on the narrative as the central draw of the game. In Japan, that's what most people see as the biggest difference."

Like *GTA* and its ilk, however, all of *Yakuza 3's* action takes place in an open world—while you can't necessarily do anything or kill anyone, you can indeed go anywhere. And while the previous two games were confined to urban areas (the cities of Tokyo and Osaka, specifically), *Yakuza 3* includes a trip to the beaches of Okinawa to boot. Our playthrough has us exploring old wooden homes built along the Okinawa shoreline, bright sunshine cascading through windows and calm gardens flourishing out front. The whole scene is rustic and gorgeous, and we're actually able to splash around in the water as it laps up onto the shore—rather pleasurable activity for a gangster, don't you think?

CRIME PLAYS

Beachside gallivanting, however, isn't Kazuma's only source of release; he *is* a gangster—and if gangsters know anything, it's how to enjoy themselves. The series has always incorporated "personal amusement" mini-games, and *Yakuza 3* brings several new ones to the table. "Golfing, fishing, and all the mini-games are solid," says Nagoshi. "*Yakuza 3* also includes darts, pool, and karaoke. We also put a lot of effort into the mini-games from past entries to make

"I wanted to lend *Yakuza* the air of a cinematic experience. When a player in the West plays, they will not only see the difference, but feel it as well."

them even better." There's also a girl-wooing mini-game, a dating sim (presented in a rhythm-action style), and a makeup creator where you can customize your girlfriend's look, all of which help—*ahem*—immerse you in your character.

Of course, the heart of *Yakuza 3's* action remains hand-to-hand combat, with Kazuma often forced to take on a group of opponents at once. In addition to more environmental interaction (weaponizing signs, parked bicycles, etc.), Kazuma is now able to handle some very serious nunchaku. In general, the combat is similar to, but more weapons-focused than *Yakuza 2:* You equip three weapons to the D-pad, and repair and fortify them as well. The combat mechanics remain a bit buttonmashy, and employ context-sensitive finishing moves in their finale, but they serve their purpose well (that is, making you feel like a bad mofo).

WE SAY MAFIA, YOU SAY YAKUZA

If nothing else, *Yakuza 3* points to the differences between American and Japanese gangster culture and, more generally, American and Japanese culture on the whole. "I'm a big fan of film, and I wanted to lend *Yakuza* the air of a cinematic experience," says Nagoshi. "When a player in the West plays any *Yakuza* game, I'm sure they will not only see the difference, but feel it as well."

While he points to the likes of Hollywood movies like *American Gangster* and *Black Rain* as influences—in addition to Japanese gangster films—it's clear that this is the product of a culture that's grown out of something completely different from our own, from the way it uses language to the way it renders violence. At the end of the day, however, *Yakuza 3* is a game that explores many of the same themes as films like *Goodfellas* and games like *GTA*—themes that are seemingly universal to gangsters the world over.

"I wanted to explore how difficult it is to believe in someone, but at the same time, that it's important to believe in others," says Nagoshi. "Nothing in this world is simply black and white." ■

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The Official Magazine

ARKHAM ASYLUM

"You're in the real world now and the lunatics have taken over the asylum."

SAVE 79%

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BIOSHOCK 2

Deeper and deeper into rapture...

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Mature
PUBLISHER: 2K Games
DEVELOPER: 2K Marin, 2K Australia, Digital Extremes, 2K China

Within the first few moments of setting foot in Rapture, it hit us—a disturbing notion that nagged at us for several troubling hours. We tried to shake the feeling. We tried to decide one way or another. And eventually we did—but it was a damn tough choice to make. ➔

STAR SYSTEM

HOW IT WORKS

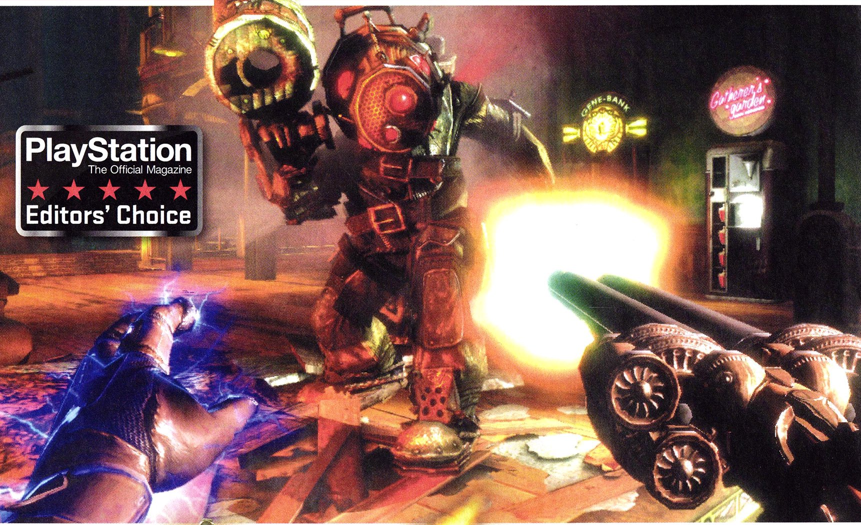
5 STARS: Legendary
A game so amazing, the entire PTOM staff recommends it. A must buy!

4 STARS: Great
A finely crafted, thoroughly enjoyable experience. Worth your time and money.

3 STARS: Enjoyable
If the topic/license/style is your thing, there's enough to keep you entertained.

2 STARS: Scarred
A smattering of entertainment hidden amongst an abundance of flaws.

1 STAR: A Flop
We played it so you don't have to. Now you owe us cookies.



PlayStation The Official Magazine
★★★★★
Editors' Choice

No, we're not talking about *BioShock's* warped sense of family values. We had no difficulty at all playing the game as a savior, adopting then rescuing every Little Sister. And we're likely to have almost as much fun harvesting (read: destroying) all those sweetly creepy children on our next playthrough.

We're talking about the startling realization that *BioShock 2* isn't merely as good as its predecessor—it's actually *better* than the original.

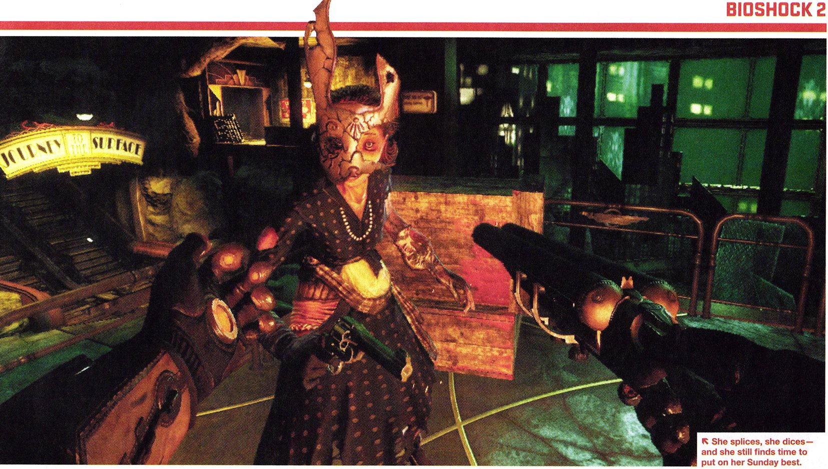
A bold statement, sure. After all, few games can summon forth such a mix of anticipation and trepidation as the sequel to one of the greatest shooters of all time—a near-perfect experience, only marred ever so slightly by a pointless final act and an awkward final boss battle. But aside from that one stumble, *BioShock* offered a beautifully crafted world with an ambitious narrative whose head ascended to lofty philosophical heights while its feet remained firmly rooted in a grounding of piss-your-pants horror. And with its diverse mix of powerful weaponry and devastating Plasmids, it played like a dream. The game was canonized and its mastermind, Ken Levine, was lionized.

All of which is why we were concerned. The bar had been set almost impossibly high—and with Levine no longer connected with the project and a new development team handling the heavy lifting, it seemed almost unreachable. Yet *BioShock 2* not only leapt over that bar, but set a new standard that we can only hope will be exceeded by its inevitable sequel.

Love thy father

So, we're a Big Daddy now. And it's 1968, some 10 years after the civil war that destroyed the utopian underwater city Rapture, triggering the events of the first game. Despite the decade away, first thing we noticed: We feel right at home.

It's not just the art deco setting. Nor is it the elegant decay that makes the fantastical city feel even more real—water leaking through cracked pipes and windows, odd vegetation sprouting up everywhere, mutated humans shacking up in the corners and shadows, trying to turn a destroyed metropolis into a home. Instead, it's that familiar *BioShock*



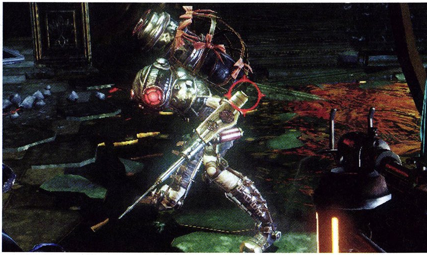
↖ She splices, she dices—and she still finds time to put on her Sunday best.

mixture of grandiosity, claustrophobia, and dread, all blended together to create a tension that transcends your typical horror game, lending a sense of verity to an unbelievable world.

The next thing we noticed: How great it feels to be a Big Daddy. But remember, we're Subject Delta, a prototype poppa who isn't hobbled like the later models we know from the original game. We still have all our cognitive functions, and we don't lumber around like the lurching simpletons who protect the Little Sisters as they gather ADAM from the corpses of the fallen citizenry. (That said, you'll still want to keep the speed-enhancing Sports Boost tonic equipped throughout the game.)

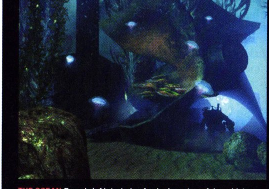
Best yet, you can finally dual-wield your weapons and Plasmids—a seemingly minor upgrade that *completely* changes the game. As soon as we acquired our first Plasmid, the now-familiar Electro Bolt, we zapped a Splicer and then dealt a killing blow with our heavy drill—the familiar one-two punch from the first game, now delivered with devastating efficiency.

And that's when it began to dawn on us. It's perhaps an unsexy word for a game this special, but *BioShock 2* is exceedingly *efficient.* The combat works even better than it did

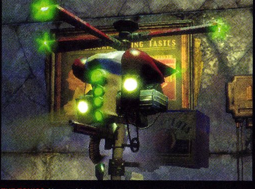


↘ What's NEW in BioShock 2

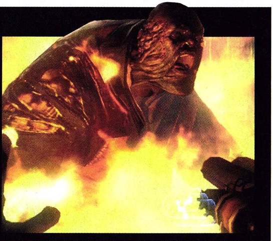
THREE OF OUR FAVORITE ADDITIONS



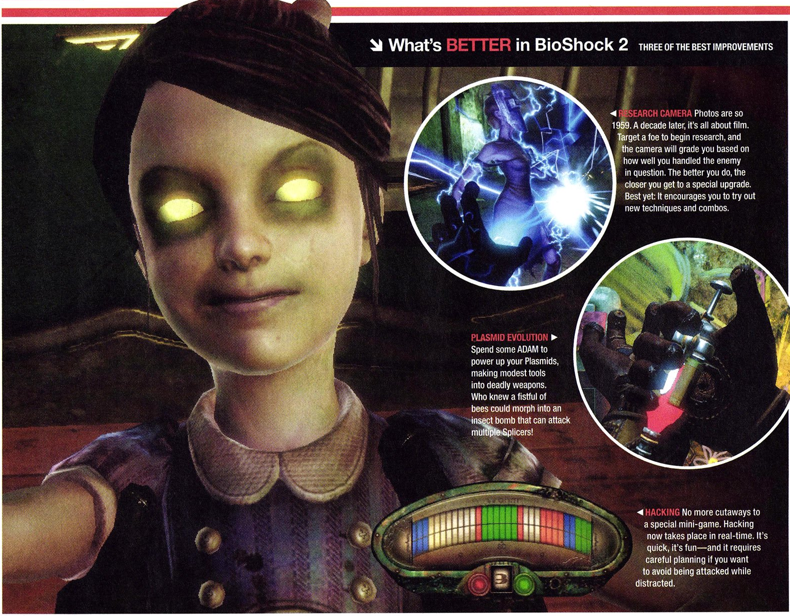
THE OCEAN For a brief interlude of calm in a stressful world, try strolling across the ocean's floor. Be sure to take in all the sights, and peek around for an ADAM slug or two.



THE TONICS Along with the standards from the original game, a few new ones made our visit even more fun. Now you can repair your bots, or slowly regain health and Eve while standing in water.



THE BRUTE He's big, he's ugly, and he's powerful. Tougher than some Big Daddies, but a delight to fight. Even late into the game, this 'roided out Splicer was still giving us fits.

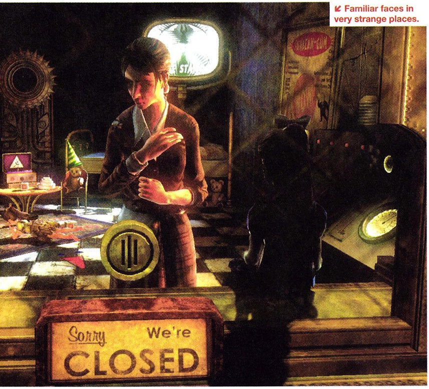


What's BETTER in BioShock 2 THREE OF THE BEST IMPROVEMENTS

RESEARCH CAMERA Photos are so 1959. A decade later, it's all about film. Target a foe to begin research, and the camera will grade you based on how well you handled the enemy in question. The better you do, the closer you get to a special upgrade. Best yet: It encourages you to try out new techniques and combos.

PLASMID EVOLUTION Spend some ADAM to power up your Plasmids, making modest tools into deadly weapons. Who knew a fistful of bees could morph into an insect bomb that can attack multiple Splicers!

HACKING No more cutaways to a special mini-game. Hacking now takes place in real-time. It's quick, it's fun—and it requires careful planning if you want to avoid being attacked while distracted.



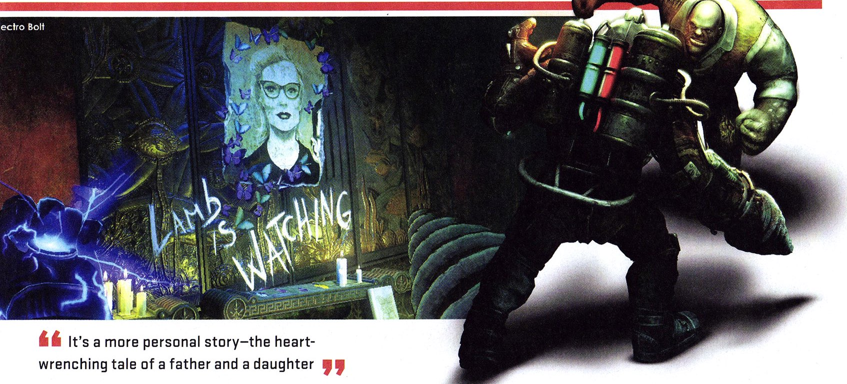
Familiar faces in very strange places.

in the original, not because they radically reinvented it, but because they refined what they already had. *BioShock,* as a shooter, was so magical because we had such a wide range of tools at our disposal, but in the first game we had to constantly fiddle around to swap between our weapons and our Plasmids. The simple act of remapping the controls so we can now shoot with one hand while blasting away with ice, lighting, flames, bees, and an assortment of mind-control powers—with absolutely no delay or switching involved—means that it's so much more *efficient* to take down Splicers in so many more inventive ways.

Bountiful harvest

That efficiency came in handy when we were faced with hordes of Splicers and Big Daddies, especially during one of our favorite events in the game: the gathering. Find a Big Daddy with a Little Sister in tow, defeat her massive protector in a heated battle, and we're left with three options: 1) Immediately harvest her for a big sum of ADAM (which can be used to purchase and enhance our Plasmids, or to customize our character with a variety of Gene Tonics). 2) Adopt her and carry her to a vent, where she can quickly be set free from her torment. 3) Set her to work gathering ADAM from specially located corpses, with the option to rescue or harvest her later.

But once our ward begins to siphon off the ichor from a corpse, Splicers swarm the area, trying to steal away our precious fluid. At that moment, the game basically abandons its deliberate pace—where creeping around every corner is rewarded—morphing into a strategic survival horror melee, with wave after relentless wave viciously attacking until our Li'l Sis is finished. It's during these intense battles that we used every trick in the book, first setting up traps (the new Cyclone Plasmid



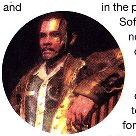
“It’s a more personal story—the heart-wrenching tale of a father and a daughter”

is especially helpful, along with trap rivets and mini-turrets), then cycling through our weapons and Plasmids to fend off the attackers. Being able to shock, shoot, freeze, blast, burn, swarm, trick, turn, and toss around our foes with greater ease than in the previous game helped us (sometimes barely) survive these thrilling encounters, breathless but enthralled.

As expected, the Big Daddies are no slouches either, and they come in a wider range than before, including one model that tosses out turrets capable of attacking us from multiple locations. (If you’re quicker than us, you can hack those turrets and turn them against your foe—or use a new Plasmid that’ll do the same job.)

And then there are the Big Sisters. Once you’ve “resolved” all the Little Sisters in an area, these lightning-fast, overpowered protectors rush to the scene, ready to take you down. While stunning to watch, they weren’t nearly as fun to fight, often appearing when we were at our weakest, leading to dull battles of attrition. Die. Respawn. Hit. Die. Respawn. Hit. Done. Only much later into the game did we figure out how to effectively dispatch them, but even then they didn’t provide the same thrill as our other foes, all of whom seemed built to challenge us while still allowing us *just* enough space to set up our attacks and take them down.

A new religion



But perhaps *BioShock 2’s* greatest efficiency is in its storytelling. Rapture is now a well-defined world, based on the corrupt ideals of its founder, Andrew Ryan—a man who embraced objectivism to such an extreme that it led to the utter decline of his great society. As in the first game, narrative is everywhere: graffiti and pictures pasted on the walls, Little Sister vents turned into makeshift shrines, audio diaries tucked away in hidden corners, cracked utterances from wandering Splicers, communications from various allies along our journey. But in *BioShock 2,* almost no time is wasted establishing this world. Instead, every moment pushes the story forward, and the narrative shows an even greater confidence than before.

Perhaps this is because Rapture’s in the process of rebuilding—Sofia Lamb’s warped notion of collectivism is delivered with the aim of picking up the pieces of a destroyed society. (Of course, her willingness to sacrifice the individual for her “greater good” is just as evil as Ryan’s elevation of the individual over society’s needs.) Or perhaps it’s because this is a more personal story—the heart-wrenching tale of a father and a daughter (the original Big Daddy/Little Sister pairing) trying to save each other. But we think it’s more than that. Rapture now exists, and every new element is another layer of depth on an already deep world.

That said, *BioShock 2* still suffers in comparison to its predecessor in a few limited ways. Aside from arch-villain Lamb, none of the sub-baddies are nearly as memorable as the original’s Dr. Steinman and Sander Cohen. We also can’t help but scratch our heads over a few plot holes big enough for a Brute Splicer to saunter through (um…so who are the Big Sisters?). And, as we noted, those Big Sis battles just aren’t much fun. The game also gets off to a slow start, only fully delivering on its promise after a few hours in, when we began exploring the undersea ghetto known as Pauper’s Drop. But from that point forward, it barrels ahead to one of the best endings ever (more than redeeming the original’s lackluster finale), both in terms of gameplay and story.

We won’t spoil it for you—it’s way too twisty, unexpected, and cool—but this much we *will* say: If you’re still wondering if *BioShock 2* is better than the original as you enter the final level, by the time you beat it, you’ll have no doubt. This is one of the best games you’ll ever play. | Gary Steinman

Rating ★★★★★

5
2
Winter Blast 2
Collected 00 B

↙ Stick around.

↑ Multiplayer Impressions

This isn’t just a sequel. It’s a prequel too, set during the civil war that triggered the events of the first game. That might be the most interesting aspect of *BioShock 2’s* multiplayer offering, a series of new maps and standard modes, but using the unique *BioShock* toolset and setting. We’re still optimistic about MP, but in a limited playtest we couldn’t shake the feeling that its appeal would be short-lived. Still, we can guarantee one thing: We’ll play through every aspect of the mode at least once, if only to see all the exclusive prequel levels and experience the story tidbits delivered to us in our own pristine undersea apartment. We’ll be back with a full MP report in an upcoming issue.

PlayStation The Official Magazine
★★★★★
Editors' Choice

HEAVY RAIN

The game has changed

PS3 **PRICE:** $59.99 **ESRB:** Mature **PUBLISHER:** SCEA **DEVELOPER:** Quantic Dream

Memories are flooding our mind. A quiet, gray afternoon in the park with our son. A knock-down, drag-out brawl in the kitchen of a hooker's seedy apartment. A panicked chase across the rooftops. A gunfight in an obscenely opulent mansion. A helpless child, trapped. A muddy crime scene with a body nestled under a makeshift tent. A dingy room with hundreds of crucifixes covering the walls. A bloody axe. A cemetery. An orchid. A kiss.

We've just finished *Heavy Rain*, and we can't get it out of our head.

Wake up call

Lasting memories might be a strange legacy for a game whose most impressive accomplishment is getting us to forget—to forget that we're manipulating a piece of interactive fiction and, most amazing of all, to forget that we're playing a game.

Heavy Rain begins with revelation. We are Ethan Mars, a man who seemingly has it all. He's a successful architect—or so it's easy to assume, judging from his beautiful house. As Ethan rises, so do we. We awake to see the warm sun filtering in through his window. We get out of bed. We wander through the empty house (the wife and kids are out shopping). We peek into a birdcage to see the beloved family pet. We stop into our kids' room and look around. We brush our teeth, shave, shower. We dress, and go downstairs. Maybe we'll have a cup of coffee. Maybe we'll get some work in, or fiddle around in the yard, or simply watch TV or listen to music...

All of this might be the most artful and subtle tutorial level we've ever enjoyed. When the game prompts us to gently push the Right-Analog stick to stand up, or asks us to hold down R2 to move our legs while swiveling our head with the Left-Analog stick to control our direction, we're immediately transfixed. The context-sensitive control scheme is unlike anything we've encountered in a game, and it quickly becomes clear that *Heavy Rain* makes a full commitment to it. Open a closet door with an appropriate half-circle motion. Juggle beanbags in our kids' room with a series of quick taps of the face buttons. Dry ourselves off after

> The context-sensitive control scheme is unlike anything we've encountered in a game, and it quickly becomes clear that *Heavy Rain* makes a full commitment to it.

As each character moves onto center stage—with the story constantly ping-ponging among them—we experience new gameplay moments.

our shower by shaking the Sixaxis. Swing our child around by twirling the Right stick (and be rewarded with his infectious laughter). Everything makes sense, and—though it's not yet evident at this early stage—the variation in movements and button-presses is simply astounding, mirroring actual movements in wholly unexpected and mind-blowing ways.

Even more impressive: Within a few hours, the controller almost melts away, becoming an extension of our hands, helping us further forget that we're manipulating pixels and polygons on screen. Oh, sure, on occasion we had to look down at the DualShock when we flubbed a move, but for the most part the controller fades away, no longer a barrier to the game's world, instead a gateway to direct connection. This might be a third-person game with a scripted (yet uniquely open-ended) narrative, but it's more immersive than any first-person game we can recall.

But back to Ethan's perfect day. Naturally, this early stage is merely a setup. After all, *Heavy Rain* isn't a joyous celebration of the mundane. Instead, it's a dark, dismal detective story; an interactive film noire in which we—through the eyes of four very different characters—unravel the mystery of the Origami Killer, a depraved serial killer who murders young boys, leaving their unscathed bodies in abandoned lots with an orchid and a piece of elegantly folded paper as the only clues.

Without spoiling anything, we'll simply say that before the opening credits finished rolling, we quite literally had to pause the game and step away to catch our breath, such was the power of the first 20 minutes of *Heavy Rain.* We were taken from the heights of effortless bliss to the depths of total loss, all with an impact and emotional engagement that's rare from a game, rivaling the best movies and contemporary fiction. With *Heavy Rain,* gaming has matured.

Before the opening credits finished rolling, we quite literally had to pause the game and step away to catch our breath.

↗ Chose carefully. If you die, the story moves on without you.

Characters with character

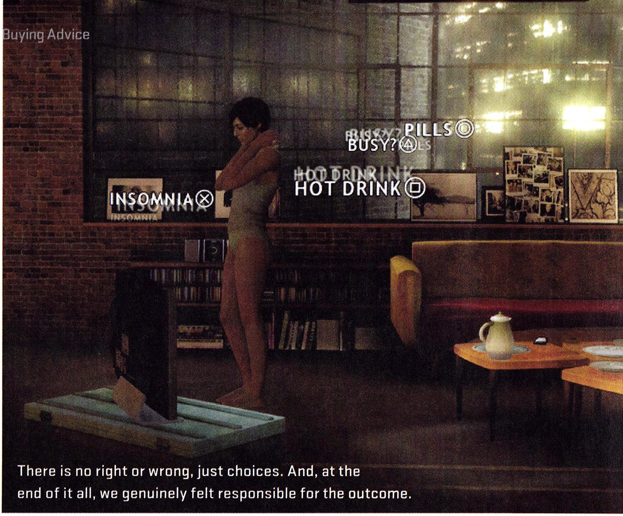
Ethan isn't alone in *Heavy Rain.* The game also stars three other characters: private investigator Scott Shelby, FBI agent Norman Jayden, and investigative reporter Madison Paige. As each one moves onto center stage—with the story constantly ping-ponging among them—we experience new and different gameplay moments.

With Scott, we survived our first fight. While it'd be easy to reduce the fight scenes to a series of quick-time events, that'd be like describing the best sushi as "a hunk of raw fish." Yes, we pushed buttons based on prompts, but somehow we were *there.* We were the ones throwing the punches, shoving our foe back against the kitchen table, stumbling to regain our balance. We deflected a broken bottle as it was being shoved toward us, the razor-sharp shards of glass coming perilously close to our face. We also took our fair share of blows—missing a prompt here or there—and marveled at how the brawl continued on, seamlessly adapting to the ever-evolving situation.

With Norman, we investigated a crime scene in a thrillingly inventive way. In what might be the only overtly game-like aspect of *Heavy Rain,* Norman sports a pair of futuristic glasses that lets him analyze his environment, spotting clues and processing the information on the fly. Later, he can analyze those clues while inside his virtual world, using an interface that makes the gesture-based computing from the film *Minority Report* look positively dated.

With Madison, we experienced the game from a different angle. Even after she gets tangled up with Ethan, Madison's involvement in the story is largely an enigma until later in the game. She plays a key role in the story, but her biggest thrills come from the choices we make while we control her. Someone is in trouble: Do we help him or walk away? Someone holds the key to the game's biggest mystery: How do we unlock that information?

And that brings us to the game's crowning achievement. Even more than the innovative control scheme, or the cinematic visuals, or the novel-like pacing, *Heavy Rain* impresses us because it's the first existential *game.* Yes, there've been existential *heroes* before—characters who are defined by the sum of their actions. But *Heavy Rain* offers us much more than that. The game itself has an astonishing ability to fill us with existential angst, because there is no right or wrong, just choices. Sometimes it's straightforward: react or not. Other times, like when Scott tries to defuse a convenience-story robbery, the choices are almost stultifying: Do we sneak up and attack the robber? Do we reason with him? Do we plead? Do we threaten? Each choice stretches the narrative in slightly different ways, but no one choice is correct. And it's precisely for that reason that our heart was literally thumping in our chest during that scene (and many others)—not just because it was a tense moment, but because *anything* could happen, and it was up to us to decide how it would all go down. And, at the end of it all, we genuinely felt responsible for the outcome.

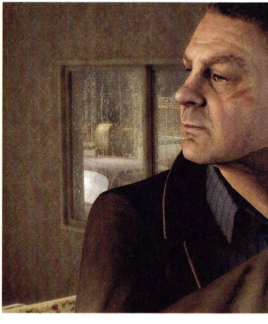


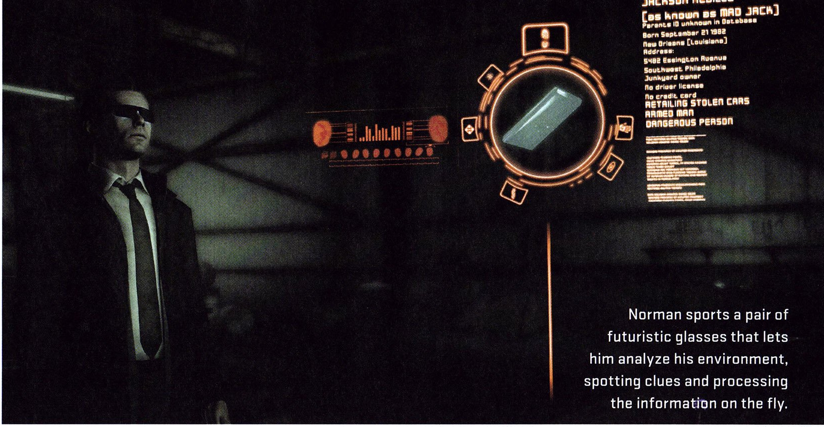
There is no right or wrong, just choices. And, at the end of it all, we genuinely felt responsible for the outcome.

➔ Simple pleasures

Think *Heavy Rain* is too intellectual or sophisticated for you? Think again! Despite the heady themes and mature storytelling, *Heavy Rain* has plenty to please those looking for a simpler thrill. Following are seven things you get to do that'll please even the most straightforward gamer.

1. DISOBEY TRAFFIC RULES
2. PUNCH PEOPLE IN THE FACE
3. ABUSE A HOOKER
4. LOOK AT BOOBIES. BOOBIES!
5. GRAB SOMEONE BY THE BALLS
6. DRINK OJ STRAIGHT FROM THE CARTON
7. SHOOT PEOPLE IN THE FACE




[as known as MAD JACK]
Parents ID unknown in Database
Born September 21 1982
New Orleans [Louisiana]
Address:
5482 Essington Avenue
Southwest Philadelphia
Junkyard owner
No driver license
No credit card
RETAILING STOLEN CARS
ARMED MAN
DANGEROUS PERSON

Norman sports a pair of futuristic glasses that lets him analyze his environment, spotting clues and processing the information on the fly.

The play's the thing

David Cage, the brilliant auteur who wrote and directed *Heavy Rain,* had said in interviews that *Heavy Rain* is not a game. We beg to differ. And not because we disagree that his latest creation stretches the boundaries of interactive entertainment. *Heavy Rain is* a game—if for no other reason—because we are proud to have this as a representative of our hobby, to claim it as ours and to call it one of our own.

Yes, we often forgot that we were controlling various characters using our DualShock—and yet there we were, making choices, pushing buttons, directly moving the narrative along with our efforts. And yes, we experienced a story delivered with more poise and maturity than we often get from our games. But we also saw some of the coolest gaming moments of this console generation. A white-knuckle highway car chase. An intense escape from a depraved torturer. A deadly maze that forced us to contort our fingers like a game of Twister to mimic our character's movements. These, along with all the subtler moments, all come together to remind us that no matter what, we're still playing *Heavy Rain* and—despite the overwhelmingly dark story—enjoying it immensely.

So make no mistake, *Heavy Rain* is indeed a game. But it is a game like none other. | Gary Steinman

Rating ★★★★★

↙ The simplest gestures can send shockwaves throughout the game.

STAR OCEAN: THE LAST HOPE INTERNATIONAL

A little more hope might've helped

PS3 PRICE: **$59.99** ESRB: **Teen** PUBLISHER: **Square Enix** DEVELOPER: **tri-Ace**

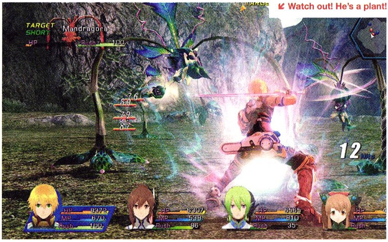
Sometimes a bit of cosmetic surgery can go a long way, improving everything from an unsightly mole to a voiceover that sounds like a stoned Minnie Mouse. *Star Ocean: The Last Hope International* certainly benefits from a few nips and tucks since last year's sans-*International* outing on the Xbox 360. For example, the pint-sized spell caster Lymle is a lot less annoying when you're listening to her original Japanese voice and staring at her fancy anime-style character portrait instead of a dead-eyed character model. However, sprucing up the surface can only go so deep—sometimes nothing short of a complete transplant can revive a role-playing game teetering on the brink of mediocrity.

Brand new BEAT

Last Hope is the fourth installment in the space opera series. It's set in the future, after World War III has wiped out Earth. The remnants of humanity—which consist of you and quite a few other wide-eyed teenagers on board some spaceships—search for a new planet to call home after getting sucked into a black hole anomaly. You arrive on a planet not knowing where your big brother's ship has gone, encounter a weird space plague, and then…

Yep, you know where this is going. Things happen, rocks fall, and you take control of a single ship containing various playable characters you encountered on different worlds while looking for stuff.

Plenty of classic *Star Ocean* gameplay elements return for the journey—most notably the Private Actions system, where roommates on the ship share special cutscenes, developing their relationships so they can gain a Rage ability that lets them defend each other during battles. The battle simulator is also back, which gives players ample time to adjust to the evolving combat. You'll not only have to master basic moves like Blindside attacks and a damage-based Rush gauge that lets you run faster and unleash more powerful attacks, but also a new tactics editor for computer-controlled characters (called the BEAT system) that lets you set behaviors for the other three characters you take into combat with you. This is pretty helpful if you've got a party full of spell-happy mages that need to conserve magic points during boss fights.

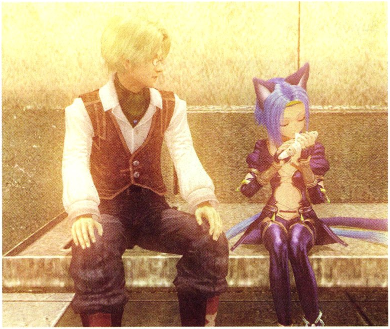


↙ Watch out! He's a plant!

Same old problems

Despite all the spiffy new stuff, *International* still suffers from old complaints like a convoluted plot and various gameplay drawbacks. For starters, the cutscenes are way too long and yet impart very little information—which is probably why

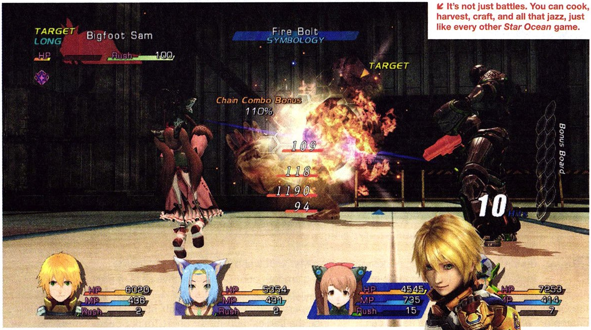
↖ The big-ticket item *International* has over the previous *Hope?* New characters!



↑ Quick Question: How many clicks does it take to save your game?

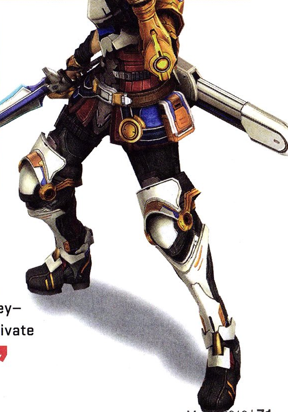
- Select "Save" from save point.
- Select save file.
- *Yes, we want to overwrite it.*
- OK, thanks for telling us you're done. System update? What…
- OK, thanks for telling us you're done with the system update.
- Do we want to continue saving our game? Um…yes? Wait, no! We're back at the select file part?!

Answer: Six. Not seven. *Six.*


TARGET LONG
Bigfoot Sam
HP
Rush 100
Fire Bolt
SYMBOLOGY
TARGET
Chain Combo Bonus
110%
109
118
1190
94
10 Hits
Bonus Board
HP 6020 MP 436 Rush 2
HP 5354 MP 431 Rush 2
HP 4545 MP 735 Rush 15
HP 7253 MP 414 7

↙ It's not just battles. You can cook, harvest, craft, and all that jazz, just like every other *Star Ocean* game.

TARGET SHORT
Vomiting Gel
TARGET
BLINDSIDE!
Bonus Board



the game has a Synopsis menu you have to check regularly to figure out what to do next. Once you decipher your objective, there's a nasty map system to contend with: the mini-map doesn't point you toward your next objective and the big map can only be accessed when you pause the game. Worse: you can't scroll on the big map, so you still can't consistently find your objective unless you're standing right near it!

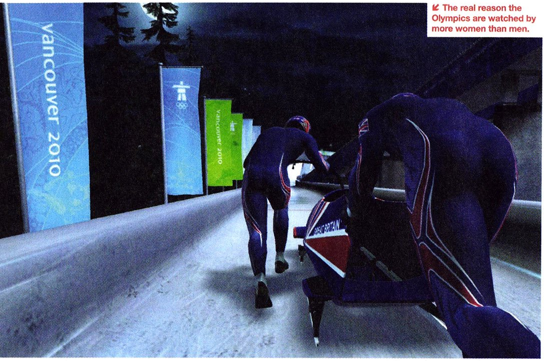
And then there's the combat, which is, quite literally, a grind. It's not that we mind fighting to gain experience points and materials, but we do bristle at senseless setups where you can't take two steps down a hallway without four enemies rushing you for an extended chain of ambush attacks.

The changes made specifically for *International* don't do much to alleviate these problems, although having some new playable characters spices up battles as you work to discover their special attacks. JRPG purists will also be pleased to have the original Japanese voiceovers, and we like the Japanese anime-style menus and portraits much better than the mismatched sci-fi ones from the Xbox 360 version.

But beauty is only skin-deep—gameplay goes a lot deeper. If *International* was supposed to be a more complete and satisfying upgrade of its predecessor, it should've opted for a bit more corrective surgery to go with its cosmetic enhancements. | AJ Glasser

Rating ★★★☆☆

> “ Plenty of classic *Star Ocean* gameplay elements return for the journey—most notably the Private Actions system. ”



↙ The real reason the Olympics are watched by more women than men.

OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES VANCOUVER 2010

Go for the Gold! Or the Bronze... The Bronze is good

PS3 PRICE: $49.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: Sega DEVELOPER: Eurocom

Admit it, you're a Luge fan, a Skeleton fanatic, a closet Nordic Combined *maniac*. You don't want to just *watch* the Olympics, you want to *be* a Finnish slalom champion, a Swedish biathlete, a Jamaican Bobsled gold medalist.

Well, this is your lucky day...sorta. In this 14-sport compilation—which lacks ice skating, hockey, and the aforementioned Nordic Combined event—Sega creates a videogame that looks like the Vancouver Winter Olympics should. The sweeping pristine vistas, ominous snaking slopes, and smartly modeled athletes all combine to make it a prettier looking game than you'd expect.

Occasionally, the gameplay is as good as the graphics. There are a few exciting attempts where fitting mechanics and simple controls combine to make a sport come to life. While the Men's Downhill and the Men's Super-G bring smooth controls and relative ease, it's the quirkier sports—the Ladies' Aerials with its four-part mechanics (aim, launch, style, landing), the Ladies' 500-meter Short Track Speedskating with its buttonmashing goodness, or even the simple but tough-to-master Men's Individual Large Hill—that piqued our interest.

But Sega didn't master all the Olympics sports, just a few. Still, if it weren't for the awkward, poorly executed 1500-meter Short Track Speedskating (which has a different mechanic from the shorter version of the event), the clunky Ski Cross, or the dull Two-man Bobsled—and the surprisingly sparse presentation—this little licensed game would be vying for a medal. | Douglass C. Perry

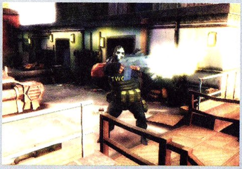
Rating ★★★☆☆

↘ Qualifying Events

THE SPORTS THAT MADE THE CUT

MEN'S EVENTS
- Downhill Skiing
- Super-G
- Individual Large Hill Ski Jumping
- Snowboard Parallel Giant Slalom
- Snowboard Cross
- Two-man Bobsled
- Skeleton
- Singles Luge

LADIES' EVENTS
- Giant Slalom Skiing
- Slalom Skiing
- 500-meter Short Track Speedskating
- 1500-meter Short Track Speedskating
- Freestyle Skiing Ski Cross
- Freestyle Skiing Aerials



↑ Basic shooter action is all you'll get in the PSP game.

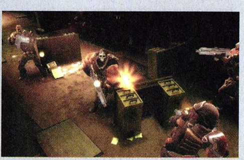
Army of Two: The 40th Day

Caught in a bad bromance

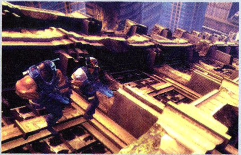
PSP PRICE: $39.99 ESRB: Mature PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts DEVELOPER: Buzz Monkey Software

The PSP version of *Army of Two: The 40th Day* takes after its PS3 sibling in name more than execution, offering a straight-up overhead shooter that drops many of the series' trademark co-op actions. Without these moves, *Army of Two* loses much of its identity, as missions devolve into simple room-clearing affairs. Actually, it's probably a good thing the AI partner isn't tasked with more than running and shooting, as the dumb lug excels only at getting shot and alerting enemies during stealth moments. Recruit a local buddy (no built-in online play, sadly) and you'll have a better time in co-op, but even then, it's hard to shake the feeling that *The 40th Day* on PSP is merely a shadow of its console-based self. | Andrew Hayward

Rating ★★☆☆☆



↑ Your AI co-op partner excels at being useless.



↑ Salem and Rios get chunky, arcade-style makeovers for the portable version of *40th Day.*

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WHITE KNIGHT CHRONICLES

Massively Mixed Outcome

PS3 PRICE: $59.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Level-5

Everyone dreams of being a knight in shining armor—which makes the prospect of transforming into a giant 23-foot-tall champion nearly irresistible. But while being a colossal force of virtue in *White Knight Chronicles* has its moments, the shine comes off the armor when the camera whacks out because you super-sized yourself while stuck in a low-ceiling dungeon. It's emblematic of *WKC's* gameplay, which is never quite as polished or compelling as you'd hoped.

Chronicles is split neatly into two portions: a main story mode and 50 or so side-quests that you can play solo or with up to three others (although it's near-impossible to complete higher level quests alone). The story, though, is trite and predictable: an average guy discovers he's heir to ancient powers that can save the world and a princess from the clutches of an evil megalomaniac.

On your own

Even playing solo, the game has a very MMO feel—scrolling text in the upper left of the screen keeps you constantly updated on characters' statuses, attacking enemies, acquired loot and so on, and bringing up the menu screen doesn't pause the game (so watch your back while organizing your inventory!).

The real-time battles offer little complexity (wait for your action gauge to fill, choose an action, hit X, repeat), so the main point of interest is in customizing your combat skills. You could sink hours into tinkering with each character's ability set—the list of attacks and spells is massive—but for most of the weapon skills, the variety is merely an illusion. You've got your basic attacks, elemental attacks that use MP (Magic Points), stronger attacks that use AC (Action Chips), and attacks that use a combination of both MP and AC, but they all feel about the same, with similar animations and damage, and switching up your attacks offers little benefit. You can also create custom combos to chain together several attacks in one turn, but there's almost no reason to use them as they eat up tons of precious AC that would be much better spent just transforming into your more powerful knight form.

While you can control only one character during battle, the two other AI characters hold their own with remarkable grace. The options for fine-tuning the AI are slim, but simply setting each one to "auto" produced consistently reliable results: The characters largely made the same

Our Day on GeoNet **We spend an afternoon soaking in *WKC's* hub**

03:25 Log in. Check our Bigelow Mail.

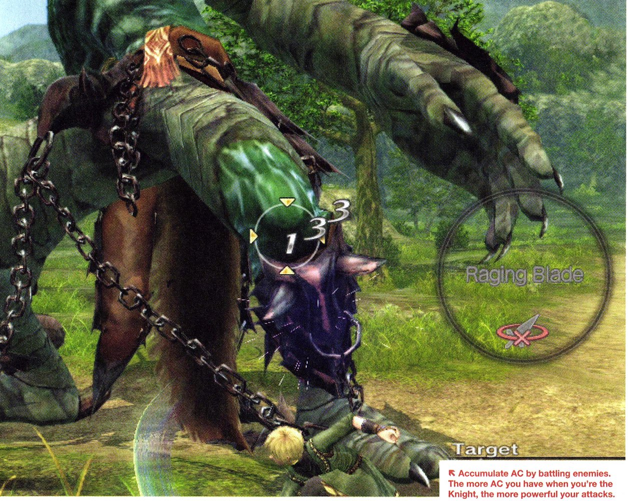
03:34 Set up a private room in My Town and invited a few friends for a voice chat.

03:47 OMG! Tetra is just as annoyed as we are at the stingy Trophies! Should we post about it on the boards?

04:12 Headed over to the store to pick up a Mage Cloak.

04:17 XeNa79 just joined us. She gave a funny look. Does this Cloak make us look fat?

04:23 The crew is all here, so we're heading out on our first Guild Rank 2 quest. When we get back, we'll update our blog to let everyone know how it turns out.



↖ Accumulate AC by battling enemies. The more AC you have when you're the Knight, the more powerful your attacks.

↗ You can edit your avatar's appearance at any save point menu.

One-Knight Stand

The pros and cons of *WKC's* biggest attraction

- **+** Leonard can transform into the White Knight practically whenever you want, since AC replenishes itself quickly.
- **+** The White Knight only uses MP-based attacks, but luckily his MP gauge is generous enough to sustain him even through big boss battles.
- **+** He's big! Seeing the tiny party members scrambling around at your feet during battle lends a cool sense of scale.
- **−** Even the Knight's strongest attacks feel restrained—we had hoped for more flourish, or at least one over-the-top super-move.
- **−** The difficulty of the main quest is surprisingly low, so transforming into the Knight rarely feels absolutely necessary.
- **−** The Dragon Knight is *wayyy* cooler than the White Knight.

decisions we would have made if we were in control, which is particularly important for support characters who always seem to heal party members at the exact right moment without wasting a drop of MP.

> “Combined, the story mode and side-quests offer an admirable amount of content, but on their own they each feel incomplete and unfinished.”

Odd one out

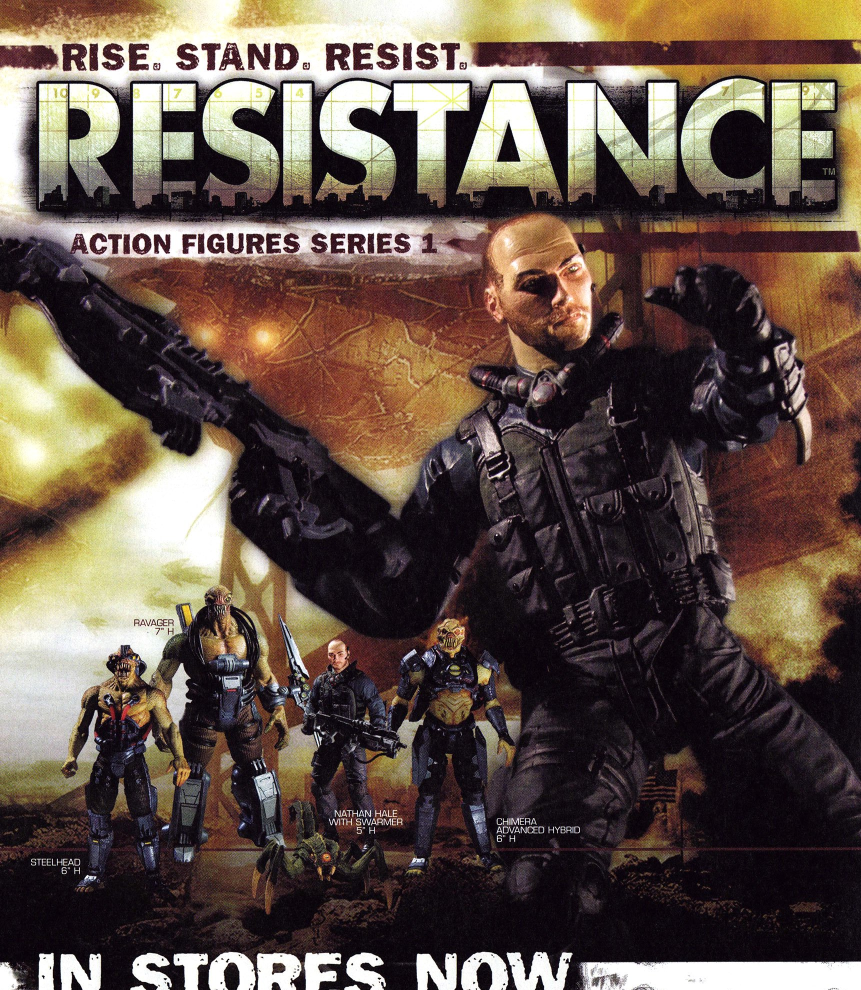
Since a big portion of the game consists of teaming up with people online, the ability to craft a personalized avatar is crucial, and *WKC* doesn't disappoint with its robust options for avatar appearance. That's all fair enough, but your avatar also tags along on the main quest, where she (or he) feels awkwardly shoehorned in. While the story focuses on protagonist Leonard (wielder of the White Knight powers) and his relationships with the other characters, your avatar is utterly ignored throughout the roughly 25 hours it takes to complete. At best the cold-shoulder treatment is mildly insulting to the character you no doubt lovingly crafted in your own glorious image, and at worst it's a distraction that takes away from your immersion in the story.

Although seemingly designed specifically for the online multiplayer portion, your avatar creates a problem there too, because she doesn't wield any knight powers. Since the side-quests actually offer more gameplay than the main story (at least in terms of hours), it doesn't make any sense that you can't use any knight powers at all, since it's supposed to be one of the game's main features. Without the ability to transform into a knight, the quests feel drab and generic, with the same environments and the same repetitive enemy types that already bored us by the end of the story campaign.

Combined, the story mode and side-quests offer an admirable amount of content, but on their own they each feel incomplete and unfinished—like resources were stretched too thin across both and neither got the attention it deserved. A few moments of originality and awe—like when you're first introduced to the massive city of Greede that teeters atop the back of an ambulatory, mile-wide turtle-like creature called a Dimithior—left us yearning for more, but ultimately *White Knight Chronicles* never quite delivered. | Carolyn Gudmundson

Rating ★★★☆☆

↙ Leonard lacks personality and you don't learn much about him during the main quest.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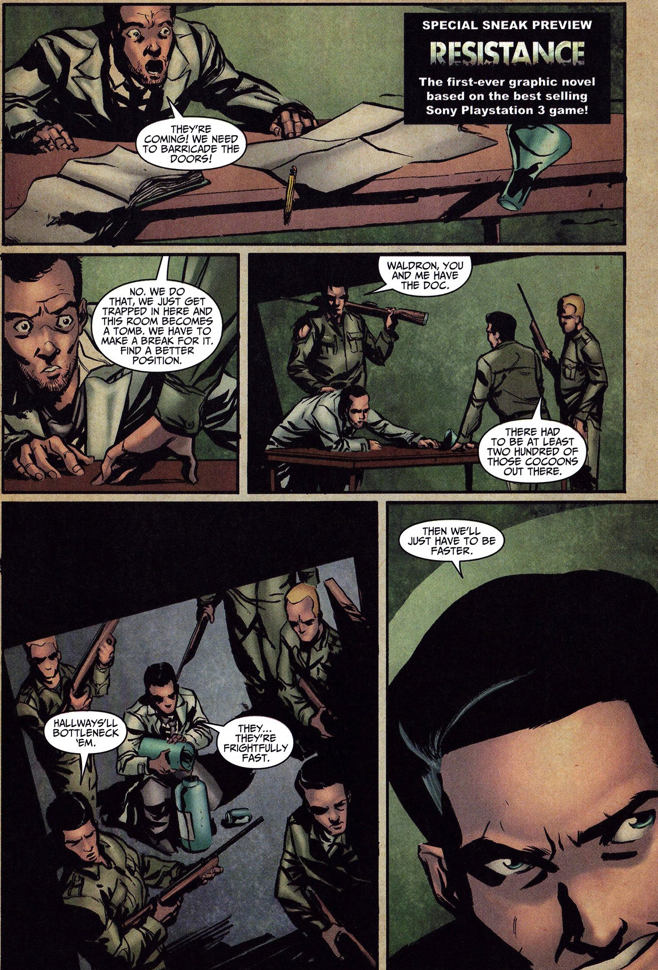
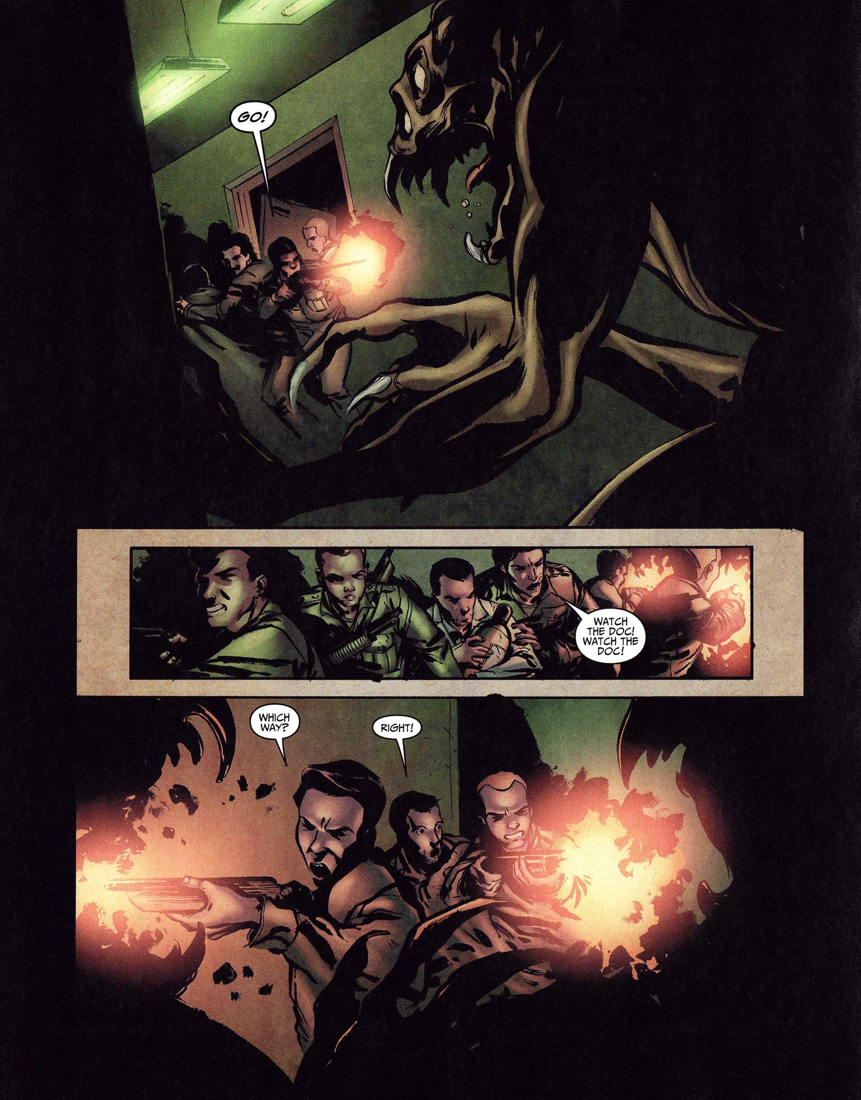


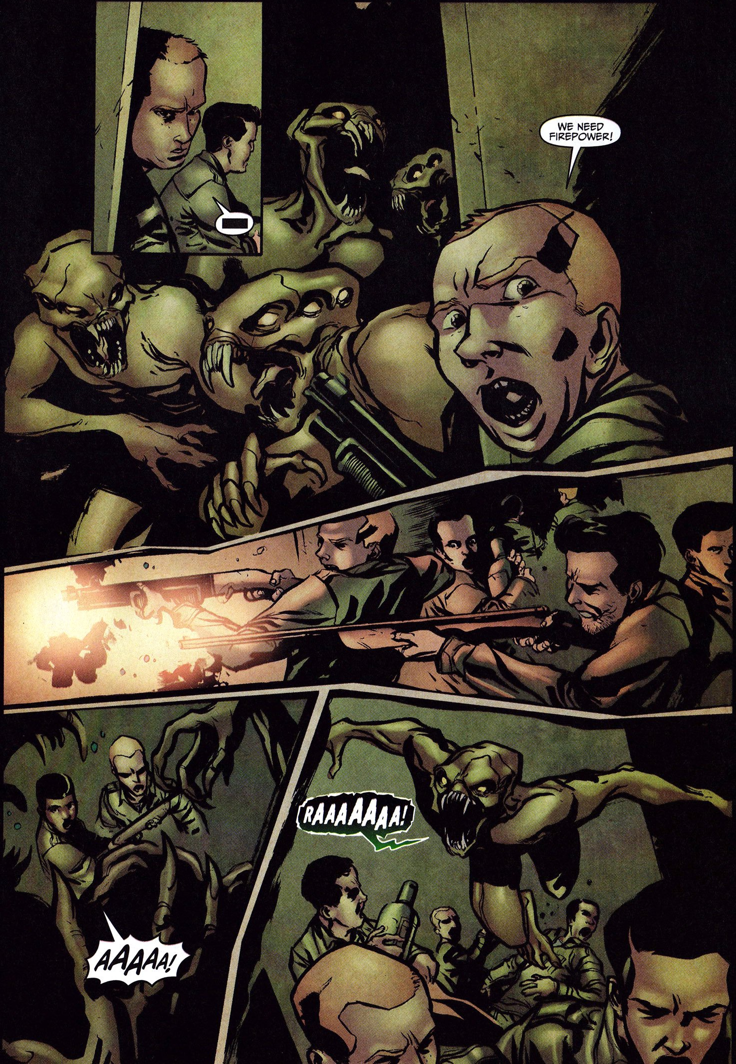
SPECIAL SNEAK PREVIEW

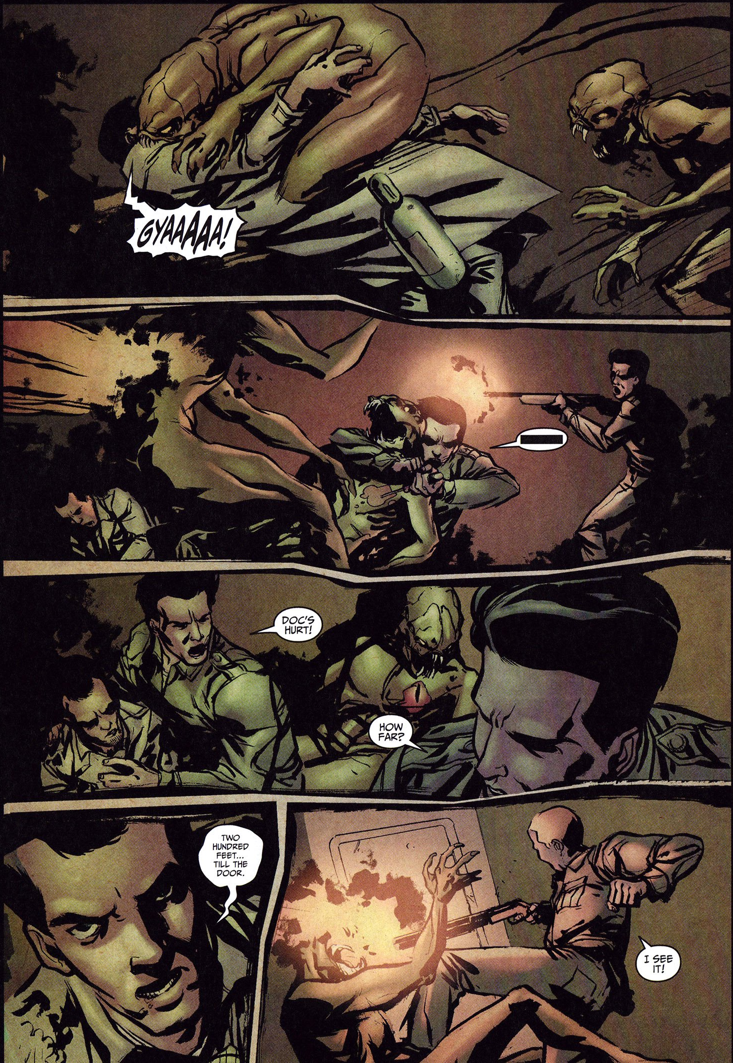
RESISTANCE

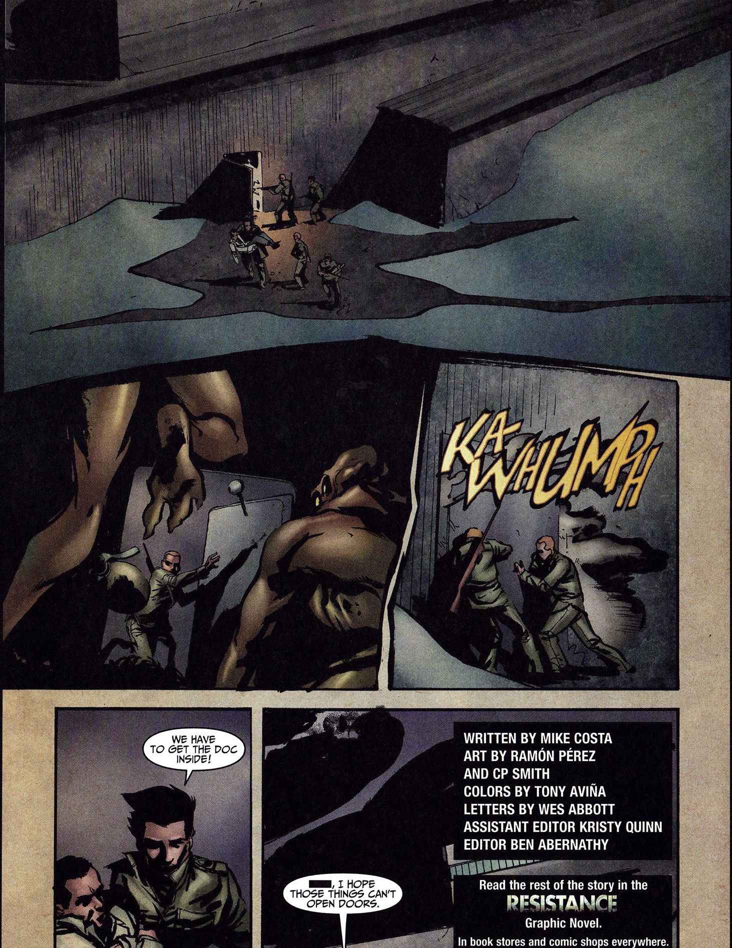
The first-ever graphic novel based on the best selling Sony Playstation 3 game!

THEY'RE COMING! WE NEED TO BARRICADE THE DOORS!
NO. WE DO THAT, WE JUST GET TRAPPED IN HERE AND THIS ROOM BECOMES A TOMB. WE HAVE TO MAKE A BREAK FOR IT. FIND A BETTER POSITION.
WALDRON, YOU AND ME HAVE THE DOC.
THERE HAD TO BE AT LEAST TWO HUNDRED OF THOSE COCOONS OUT THERE.
HALLWAYS'LL BOTTLENECK 'EM.
THEY... THEY'RE FRIGHTFULLY FAST.
THEN WE'LL JUST HAVE TO BE FASTER.


GO!
WATCH THE DOC! WATCH THE DOC!
WHICH WAY?
RIGHT!


WE NEED FIREPOWER!
AAAAA!
RAAAAAAA!


GYAAAAA!
[redacted]
DOC'S HURT!
HOW FAR?
TWO HUNDRED FEET... TILL THE DOOR.
I SEE IT!


KA-WHUMPH
WE HAVE TO GET THE DOC INSIDE!
[redacted], I HOPE THOSE THINGS CAN'T OPEN DOORS.

WRITTEN BY MIKE COSTA
ART BY RAMÓN PÉREZ
AND CP SMITH
COLORS BY TONY AVIÑA
LETTERS BY WES ABBOTT
ASSISTANT EDITOR KRISTY QUINN
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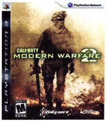


Pub Activision
Dev Infinity Ward
Players 1 to 18
Rated 5 stars | PTOM Jan 10 issue

Modern Warfare 2 provides an epic, though short, single-player experience that's consistently thrilling. But it's even better in multiplayer—Spec Ops is co-op gold, and the Versus gameplay is even better than *CoD4's*.

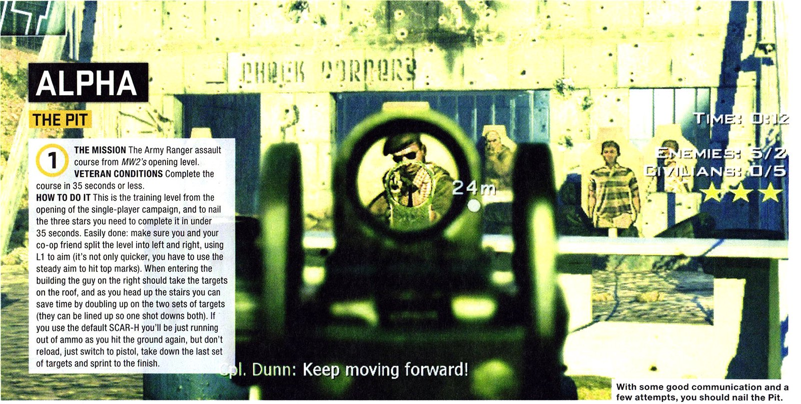
Three-star every Spec Ops mission

James Coates

Co-op modes are the new awesome. Infinity Ward doesn't do things by halves, and they've made the most varied, challenging and replayable co-op mode since forever with Spec Ops. It consists of 23 missions over five different stages, with one to three stars awarded for each depending on difficulty level (one for Regular, two for Hardened, three for Veteran). What you have here is our guide to nailing all 23 missions on Veteran mode, which should be used with two things in mind: first, the later levels are incredibly challenging and require loads of practice, and second, Spec Ops is designed for two people and only a madman would try any of this on solo.

ALPHA

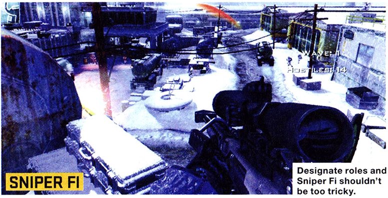
THE PIT



1

THE MISSION The Army Ranger assault course from *MW2's* opening level.
VETERAN CONDITIONS Complete the course in 35 seconds or less.
HOW TO DO IT This is the training level from the opening of the single-player campaign, and to nail the three stars you need to complete it in under 35 seconds. Easily done: make sure you and your co-op friend split the level into left and right, using L1 to aim (it's not only quicker, you have to use the steady aim to hit top marks). When entering the building the guy on the right should take the targets on the roof, and as you head up the stairs you can save time by doubling up on the two sets of targets (they can be lined up so one shot downs both). If you use the default SCAR-H you'll be just running out of ammo as you hit the ground again, but don't reload, just switch to pistol, take down the last set of targets and sprint to the finish.

With some good communication and a few attempts, you should nail the Pit.

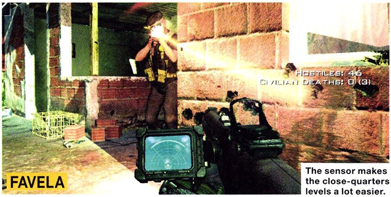


SNIPER FI

Designate roles and Sniper Fi shouldn't be too tricky.

2

THE MISSION An enemy attack set in a snowy industrial area.
VETERAN CONDITIONS Survive five waves of enemy attackers.
HOW TO DO IT Fairly straightforward. One of you should take the front edge of the platform you start on and use the sniper to catch enemies heading down the main strip, while the other should grab the Predator missile briefcase (and use it to take down incoming trucks and troop transports) and keep an eye on the helipad to the front left of the platform. It's worth putting some Claymores at the base of the ladder to the left of the platform too.

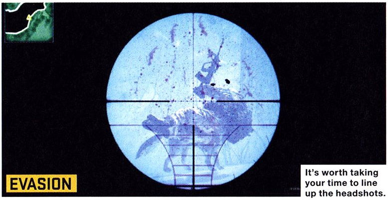


FAVELA

The sensor makes the close-quarters levels a lot easier.

3

THE MISSION Hunt hostiles through the mazey Brazilian favela.
VETERAN CONDITIONS Kill 50 enemies and no more than three civilians.
HOW TO DO IT The key is sticking together, as the shantytown is so intricately plotted and there are very few secure points of cover. Enemies have a habit of popping up unseen in windows and on rooftops. Make sure you grab the AA-12 equipped with hearbeat sensor which his located near your initial spawn point, as it's super handy for spotting incoming attackers. There's no penalty for being defensive—work slowly through the alleyways and buildings.



EVASION

It's worth taking your time to line up the headshots.

4

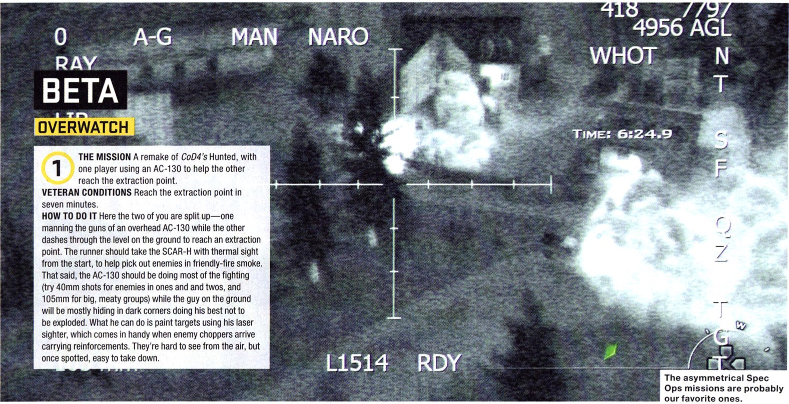
THE MISSION Evade enemy patrols through snowy woods to the extraction point.
VETERAN CONDITIONS Sharper enemies and increased damage.
HOW TO DO IT Don't go loud. That's the big rule. Every time you're spotted by enemy patrols extra soldiers with dogs arrive to murder you. Memorize the position and movement of the patrols (four at the start, then a man and dog walking up the path, then three guards smoking cigarettes and so on), and make sure you've got a kill shot before you pull the trigger. Work through larger groups by taking down the man at the back so the others won't notice.

SUSPENSION

The enemies are limited. Stay back and pick them off.

5

THE MISSION Move from one end of an iron bridge to the extraction point at the other.
VETERAN CONDITIONS Sharper enemies and increased damage.
HOW TO DO IT With no time limit, reaching the other side is a matter of using cover patiently, sticking close to your partner for easy revivals, and not getting blown up by standing too close to exploding cars. The only real excitement is when the enemy gunship arrives at the halfway mark. The bridge cracks across the middle—have one of you stay covered in the lower part ready to revive the other, who grabs an RPG to take out the chopper.



BETA
OVERWATCH

1 **THE MISSION** A remake of *CoD4's* Hunted, with one player using an AC-130 to help the other reach the extraction point.

VETERAN CONDITIONS Reach the extraction point in seven minutes.

HOW TO DO IT Here the two of you are split up—one manning the guns of an overhead AC-130 while the other dashes through the level on the ground to reach an extraction point. The runner should take the SCAR-H with thermal sight from the start, to help pick out enemies in friendly-fire smoke. That said, the AC-130 should be doing most of the fighting (try 40mm shots for enemies in ones and and twos, and 105mm for big, meaty groups) while the guy on the ground will be mostly hiding in dark corners doing his best not to be exploded. What he can do is paint targets using his laser sighter, which comes in handy when enemy choppers arrive carrying reinforcements. They're hard to see from the air, but once spotted, easy to take down.

The asymmetrical Spec Ops missions are probably our favorite ones.

COMBO X10
SOLID KILL!
10000
BONUS: 1350
TIME: 0:08.5
REMAINING: 29000

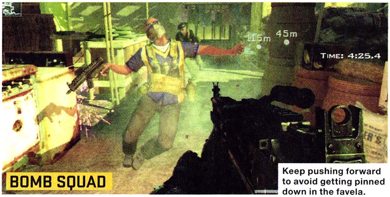
BODY COUNT

The combo mechanic changes the pace slightly.

2 **THE MISSION** Clear enemy targets while defending a diner in suburban America.

VETERAN CONDITIONS Score 30,000 points.

HOW TO DO IT The sensible way to do this is to grab the thermal sight SCAR-H from the spread of guns outside the diner and take ranged shots at the enemies exiting the gas station while the other fires on the attackers coming from the side entrance. You'll need around 30 grunt kills to hit the target, which is easy if you stay near enough to revive each other and don't let the diner be overrun. You can also try grabbing the RPG and popping the troop transport early on.



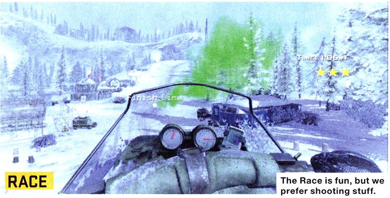
BOMB SQUAD

Keep pushing forward to avoid getting pinned down in the favela.

3 **THE MISSION** Disarm three bombs in the Brazilian favela.

VETERAN CONDITIONS Complete the mission in under five minutes.

HOW TO DO IT You don't have time to engage in stationary battles. To avoid time-costing backtracking, take the bomb in the marketplace first, to the right of the start point. Pick up the M240 at the start. When the first bomb's done, switch to the M1014 holographic for the second bomb, which is all about moving quickly through buildings and picking off targets. And for the third, throw grenades like you're tossing bread to ducks then dash in and clean up.



RACE

The Race is fun, but we prefer shooting stuff.

4 **THE MISSION** A rerun of the snowmobile race from Cliffhanger in the single-player campaign.

VETERAN CONDITIONS Finish the course in 70 seconds.

HOW TO DO IT No tricks here—this one's a matter of learning the course, staying in open space, and not making any sudden or sharp turns. At the beginning of the race hit the accelerator just as "Go!" appears after the countdown and you'll get a quick start. You don't need to attack the other snowmobiles, but it helps to get them out of the way. And on the final downhill stretch, keep your eyes ahead of your own vehicle and make gentle adjustments.

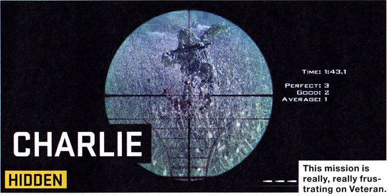
BIG BROTHER

Consider your airborne buddy as a guardian angel.

5 **THE MISSION** Based on the Wolverines level from the single player, one player uses a helicopter gun to guide the other to the extraction point.

VETERAN CONDITIONS Reach the extraction point in 10 minutes.

HOW TO DO IT Call out targets quick, and don't be stingy with the ammo—absolutely hose targets, using L1 to slow the chopper down. And take out as many explosive objects—cars, gas tanks—as you can. Crucially, when the runner hits the diner roof at the very end, make sure he runs straight towards the green smoke to give the chopper a clear line of fire.



CHARLIE

HIDDEN

This mission is really, really frustrating on Veteran.

1

THE MISSION Based on All Ghillied Up from *CoD4*. Avoid enemy snipers and patrols and reach the extraction point.

VETERAN CONDITIONS Sharper enemies and increased damage.

HOW TO DO IT Trial and error. Take out the standard patrols at the start of the mission with a knife and a silenced sniper shot. Then head past the freight containers into the first field—there are three snipers here. After the first field there are four snipers in the next, and a final four in the field beyond the church. Arduous, but doable if you manage to take them out quickly.

BREACH & CLEAR

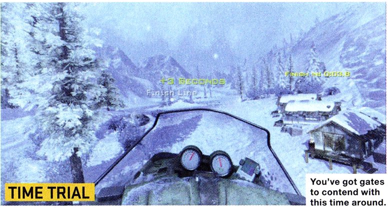
Split up to combat the riot shield men easily.

2

THE MISSION From a section of the Gulag level from the single-player campaign—reach the extraction point through a disused shower room.

VETERAN CONDITIONS Reach the extraction point in three minutes.

HOW TO DO IT There are a limited number of enemies on the level, but the three minute cap doesn't leave much time for picking them off. Being aggressive is the key. Use grenades to slow down the balcony gunmen and when the riot shield guys arrive, you and your buddy should toss flash bangs and split left and right so you can shoot them in the back.



TIME TRIAL

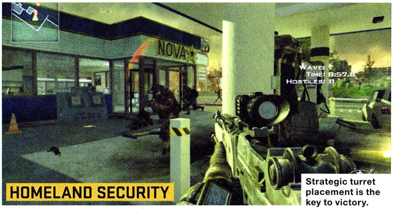
You've got gates to contend with this time around.

3

THE MISSION Race your snowmobile through time gates to the objective.

VETERAN CONDITIONS A starting "remaining time" of eight seconds, with three seconds added for every gate.

HOW TO DO IT This time-extend chase covers the same course as the earlier mission Race, only this time there are black and red slalom-style gates marked on the course which extend the (not very generous to start with) time limit. The key things to note: you don't need to blaze through the level like you did in Race—catching all the gates and not crashing is more important than raw speed.



HOMELAND SECURITY

Strategic turret placement is the key to victory.

4

THE MISSION An enemy attack on a suburban retail area.

VETERAN CONDITIONS Survive five waves of enemy attackers.

HOW TO DO IT First, ditch the gas station spawn point. It might be defendable on Hardened, but here it's like an exploding coffin. The diner next door is a much better bet. Grab the thermal sight weapon from the mat and make sure you place and activate both the turrets found at Nova Star and the one at Joe's. Place one turret in the alcove of the diner entrance and one in the alley behind, and set Claymores at the door itself. Use your thermal and stay close to your partner.

141m
No Flash Grenade Ammo Remaining
TIME: 5:06.3
M4A1 GRENADIER W/ RED DOT SIGHT
W

SNATCH & GRAB

5

THE MISSION Retrieve laptop intel and reach the extraction point in a plane-crash junk yard.

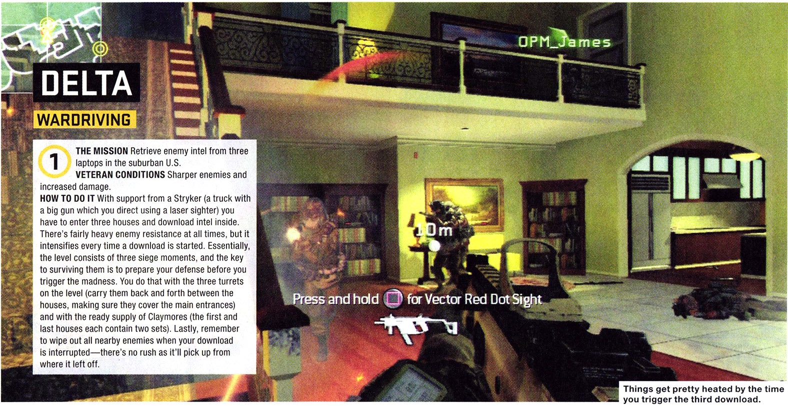
VETERAN CONDITIONS Sharper enemies and increased damage.

HOW TO DO IT Like a punch someone's been saving in their pocket to give you for a special occasion, Snatch & Grab introduces a new enemy to *Modern Warfare 2's* roster: the Juggernaut. And he's a serious bastard. Aggressive, mobile, and covered in thick armor, there are four of these placed in what is otherwise a straightforward run (and pick up laptop) and gun. Taking them down quickly (and, wherever possible, individually) is essential to prevent you from being overrun by the regular grunts, and the best way to do that is with a flash bang grenade and several rounds to the head. Listen for the quiet but ominous change in the game's music when they spot you, because once you're in their sights they don't stop charging.

You'll get a Trophy for taking down your first Juggernaut in Spec Ops.

DELTA

WARDRIVING



1

THE MISSION Retrieve enemy intel from three laptops in the suburban U.S.

VETERAN CONDITIONS Sharper enemies and increased damage.

HOW TO DO IT With support from a Stryker (a truck with a big gun which you direct using a laser sighter) you have to enter three houses and download intel inside. There's fairly heavy enemy resistance at all times, but it intensifies every time a download is started. Essentially, the level consists of three siege moments, and the key to surviving them is to prepare your defense before you trigger the madness. You do that with the three turrets on the level (carry them back and forth between the houses, making sure they cover the main entrances) and with the ready supply of Claymores (the first and last houses each contain two sets). Lastly, remember to wipe out all nearby enemies when your download is interrupted—there's no rush as it'll pick up from where it left off.

Things get pretty heated by the time you trigger the third download.

WRECKAGE

OPM_James
VEHICLES: 10
WRECKAGE IN: 4
INFINITE AMMO: 0:33.7
Overlord: Hunter 2-1, relay from Solaris: ... you got an enemy helicopter loaded for bear, approaching your area, over.

Keep your distance from the cars to stay alive.

2

THE MISSION Destroy every vehicle on the same bridge as featured in Suspension.

VETERAN CONDITIONS Sharper enemies and increased damage.

HOW TO DO IT Destroy 35 vehicles. One of the easier later missions, there are two ways to play this. The "proper" way has you flying in with RPGs and grenades, blowing up cars and trucks while engaging enemy troops at the same time. Less fun, but more calculated and successful is the method of clearing all the enemies first—playing the mission exactly like the earlier Suspension, with lots of cover and accurate burst fire—before going postal on the cars.

ACCEPTABLE LOSSES

OPM_James
18m

This one's not that hard if you take the right route.

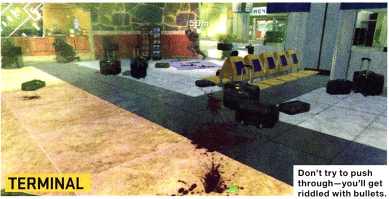
3

THE MISSION Plant three C4 explosives on enemy targets.

VETERAN CONDITIONS Sharper enemies and increased damage.

HOW TO DO IT Chose your free-firing moments carefully on this one. There are three targets on your radar—head right out of the cul-de-sac where you spawn and you'll find yourself on a runway. Use the heart monitor to spot enemies and only kill them when necessary. Plant C4 on the first jet, then move down the runway and do the other. The third target is a little further away in a cluster of buildings. Use the second break in the fence as your entry point.

TERMINAL



Don't try to push through—you'll get riddled with bullets.

4

THE MISSION Fight through enemies to reach the extraction point in the airport building of No Russian from the single-player campaign.

VETERAN CONDITIONS Sharper enemies and increased damage.

HOW TO DO IT Played straight, this is like marching through a swamp of fire, bullets, and stinging nettles. So cheat. The waves of enemies are made up of regular grunts and the meatier shield carriers, and as the AI always come looking for you, the trick is to spawn them and run away, back to your own start area. Hold back here or use a riot shield when moving forward.

ESTATE TAKEDOWN

HOSTILES: 36

Stay close in the larger levels to enable quick revives.

5

THE MISSION Hunt hostiles through the leafy Estate grounds.

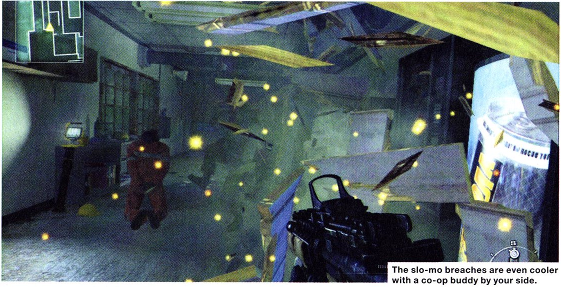
VETERAN CONDITIONS Eliminate 40 hostiles.

HOW TO DO IT The Barrett sniper is your friend. It's the start weapon in this elimination hunt, and you'll need it because the level's full of Juggernauts. The rules are broadly similar to O Cristo Redentor—there's no time limit, so stay defensive, be patient, and stick together. The drama will come when your ammo runs dry. There's a cabin just up the hill from the boat house which contains an ammo crate—clear the area first then move up when you get a chance.

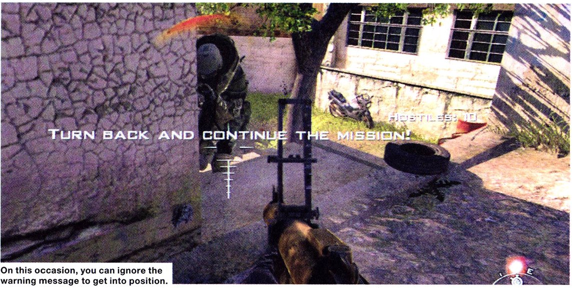
ECHO

WETWORK

1 **THE MISSION** Breach rooms and rescue hostages on a Russian oil rig from campaign level The Only Easy Day...was Yesterday.
VETERAN CONDITIONS Sharper enemies and increased damage.
HOW TO DO IT By being really fast or, more like, by doing it over and over again. The mission breaks down into two main sections—slow-motion breach and clear moments with hostages to rescue, and horribly sturdy firefights in the dark against concealed enemies. The hostage rooms require sharp shooting and accuracy—there's only really time for headshot kills—and the climactic one is the hardest. Practice is the only answer. For the in-between bits: use a flash bang every time you turn a corner, fire your M4 grenades at groups of spawning enemies at the start of every encounter, and both you and your buddy should grab thermal sight weapons before the smoked-out assault near the end. Good luck.



The slo-mo breaches are even cooler with a co-op buddy by your side.



On this occasion, you can ignore the warning message to get into position.

HIGH EXPLOSIVE

2 **THE MISSION** Kill 10 Juggernauts in the cruel murderpool that is the favela.
VETERAN CONDITIONS Sharper enemies and increased damage.
HOW TO DO IT This level is basically impossible. Or at least it would be but for the fact there's not just one but two glitchy ways of smashing it to bits. The first and more complicated way is for you and your partner to rush to a house on the right side of the map, with one of you hidden inside and the other blocking the doorway. When the Juggernaut comes he'll shoot the doorway guy (who then slashes at him from the floor) but won't be able to get to the other, who heals his buddy. The better way, though, is to use the Thumper grenade launcher you start with. From the start, run to the right. Keep running, even when you get a warning message about leaving the fight. You'll find some stairs and a cul-de-sac. When you lure them in, the Juggernauts get stuck at the top of the stairs every time, allowing you to blow them to bits. Lure, kerpow, repeat. It's a dirty trick, but it works.

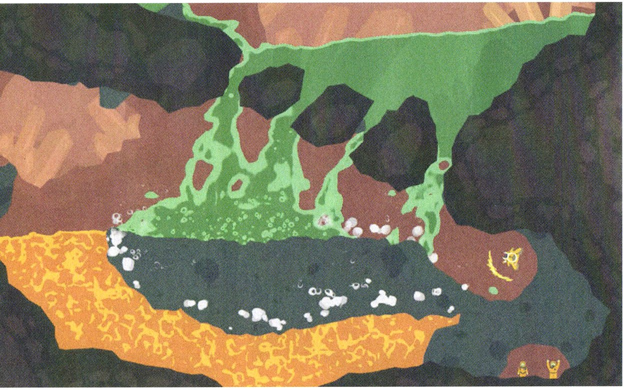
You'll be seeing a lot of the red stuff throughout the later stages of Spec Ops.

Reload
Host
10

ARMOR PIERCING

3 **THE MISSION** Kill 15 Juggernauts on the oil rig.
VETERAN CONDITIONS Sharper enemies and increased damage.
HOW TO DO IT The "blocking a doorway" exploit works here too, although you'll need some serious skill in the first place to get it set up. Grab Barretts from the start position, and get ready to make a dash for the helipad at the top of the oil rig. You'll probably run into three or four Juggernauts on your way—either snipe them from range, or daze them with a flash bang and no-scope their big, white butts. Once you're upstairs, head to the northwest corner of the rig. Go through a couple of office rooms and you'll find a dead end with a single doorway. Tada! Plug the doorway with you or your partner's body, then wait for the Juggernauts to arrive and stab/revive your way to victory.

PlayStation Network Games



PixelJunk Shooter

PRICE: $9.99 ESRB: Everyone 10+
PUBLISHER: SCEA DEVELOPER: Q-Games

+ Don't be fooled by its name; *PixelJunk Shooter* isn't about shooting everything in sight. It's more about using your noggin to figure out the safest way to puzzle through unstable subterranean tunnels. As the pilot of a small fighter craft tasked with investigating a distress signal on an unknown planet, you'll adventure deep beneath the surface to rescue the trapped survivors of a mining colony. In addition to guns and missiles for defense, your ship is equipped with a grappling hook that can be used to grab survivors, collect gems, and interact with other objects you encounter.

Staying alive and keeping your ship from overheating aren't the only challenges you'll face—the unusual lay of the land provides the thrust for *Shooter's* entrancing exploration-based puzzles. Flowing lava, dripping water, solid ice, volatile gas, and other substances found in the labyrinthine caverns behave as you might expect, and you'll need to experiment with their unique properties and discover how they react with one another to accomplish each mission. Factor in an elegantly minimalist art style, some crazy boss fights, and superb two-player co-op, and you have another compelling *PixelJunk* game. | Nathan Meunier

Call of Duty: Classic

PRICE: $14.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Aspyr/Infinity Ward

+ World War II-themed shooters may have been done to death and then some, but the original *Call of Duty* ranks up there as one of the best in the genre—at least for its time. As an HD console port of the original PC hit, *CoD: Classic* wears its age on its sleeve, for better or for worse. The good news: the gripping first-person action is still as strong as ever, reminding us why we fell in love with the series in the first place. | NM

Byte-sized PSP Minis

Tasty downloadable morsels for your PSP

Kahoots

PRICE: $4.59 ESRB: Everyone

+ Collecting yummy cake in challenging block-sliding puzzle levels is made even more charming by the silly, singsong instructions delivered by a talking hacky-sack monster with a clothespin head.

Zombie Tycoon

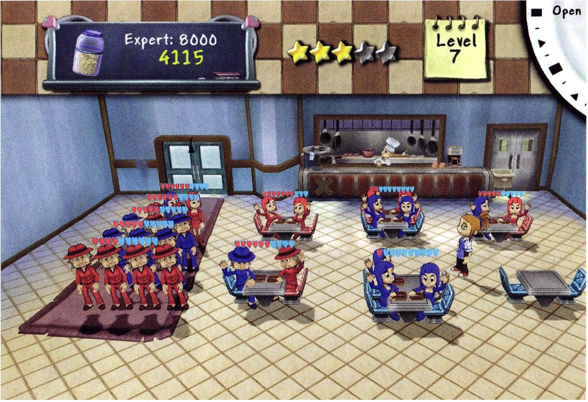
PRICE: $7.99 ESRB: Teen

+ Sending hordes of zombies rampaging across the land is wickedly delightful, thanks to tight squad controls and a great sense of humor. Zombie fashion accessories are so chic.

Stand O' Food

PRICE: $4.99 ESRB: Everyone

+ Even without a minimum wage, assembly line burger production is a lot more fun in puzzle form. Variety and spice make this fast and furious food-crafting Mini a tasty dish.



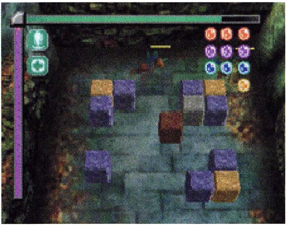
Diner Dash

PRICE: $9.99 ESRB: Everyone
PUBLISHER: Hudson Ent. DEVELOPER: PlayFirst

+ Ditching the tailored business suit and high pressures of the corporate world, *Diner Dash's* multitalented proprietor Flo decides to cook up her own recipe for stress by opening a greasy spoon.

In reality, waiting tables and dealing with irritable customers for low wages and crummy tips isn't so hot, but *Diner Dash* manages to make those unpleasant tasks a lot more fun by challenging you to singlehandedly attend to an entire restaurant full of hungry diners. As a steady stream of color-coded customers comes in, you seat them, take their order, deliver their food, collect their money, and bus the tables.

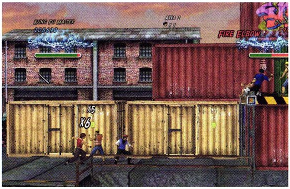
Already an established franchise on PC, the PSN version of *Dash* also lets you assume control of Flo directly for the very first time. While the analog-stick–based control system is a bit unwieldy in comparison to utilizing a mouse-and-keyboard setup, it's manageable and doesn't spoil the main dish: Frantically running around the restaurant and juggling all the time-management chaos. | NM



Beta Bloc

PRICE: $4.99 ESRB: Everyone PUBLISHER: D3 DEVELOPER: Tamsoft

– Turning your PSP on its side sure is an awkward way to play this unusual block-breaking RPG hybrid. In addition to trying to smash all the blocks in each stage by hitting a ricocheting energy ball with a mechanical dragon, you mash buttons to fire off magical blasts to defeat crawling monsters and take on specific challenges to collect powerful artifacts. While it's an interesting experiment, the fantasy RPG elements and the arcade-style gameplay don't mesh very well. | NM



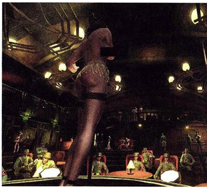
Revenge of the Wounded Dragons

PRICE: $9.99 ESRB: Teen PUBLISHER: SOE DEVELOPER: Wanako Games/A2M

– Mafia thugs steal your sister and kill your grandfather, sparking your token walk down the kung-fu path of vengeance. The energized brawling and platforming action is sprinkled with cleverly named moves called out by a *Mortal Kombat*-style narrator. Busy levels are littered with fun items to wield, like hatchets, salted fish, and explosives. And kicking gun-wielding ruffians in the junk is mildly amusing. However, the overall repetitiveness of the gameplay is not. This game is trying way too hard to be *Double Dragon*. | NM

Play On

Must-have add-ons from the PlayStation Store

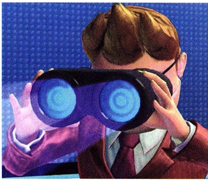


The Saboteur
The Midnight Show

PRICE: $2.99 ESRB: Mature
If topless dancers are your thing, you won't want to miss this. But the real reason you need it is to unlock all the new hiding spots.

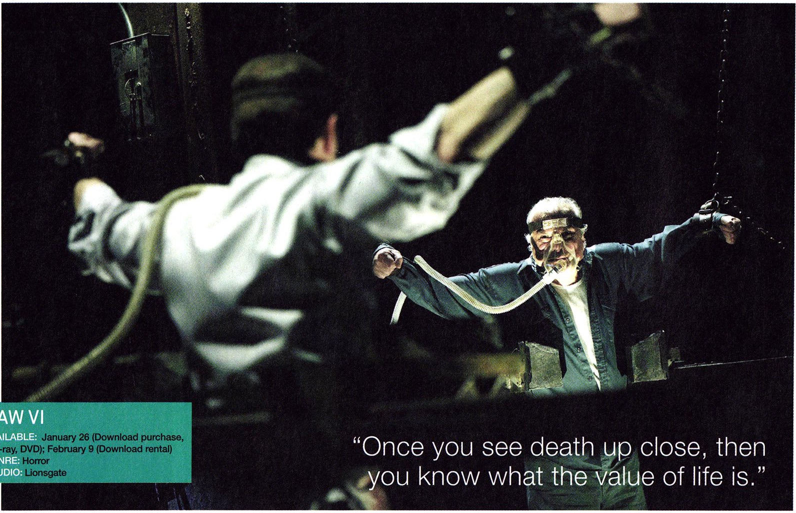
inFamous
Gigawatt Blades

PRICE: Free ESRB: Teen
Turn Cole's fists into pulsing pistons of supercharged death. Crave some destruction? You'll need these bad boys.



Buzz! Question Pack: Rock Idols

PRICE: $7.99 ESRB: TEEN
Think you're the top dog when it comes to rock trivia? This quiz pack's 500-plus face-melting questions might prove otherwise.



SAW VI

AVAILABLE: January 26 (Download purchase, Blu-ray, DVD); February 9 (Download rental)
GENRE: Horror
STUDIO: Lionsgate

"Once you see death up close, then you know what the value of life is."

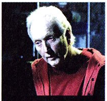
PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're downloading to our PS3 this month

The sixth annual installment of the ruthless and relentless *SAW* series continues the saga of the Jigsaw Killer's monstrous machinations. Special Agent Peter Strahm is dead and Detective Mark Hoffman has emerged as the serial killer's successor, but Jigsaw is still orchestrating events from beyond the grave. The game is once again in motion with the nefarious killer's grand scheme to finally(?) be revealed in a grisly, gruesome showdown with the…um, healthcare industry. Damn those insurance companies!

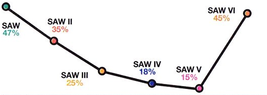
Why We're Watching

It's topical: The healthcare debate in *SAW VI* is so much more compelling than the one in congress.



The life lessons: Everything we need to know about anger management and conflict resolution, we learned from Jigsaw.

Gaming nostalgia: When you think about it, *SAW* is like playing the board game Mouse Trap—except there's a barbed, fragmentation grenade-tipped spear that impales the rat through its anus.



According to RottenTomatoes.com's review ratings, *SAW VI* marks a dramatic qualitative upswing for the franchise.

The *Boston Phoenix* review said: "One can only hope that Jigsaw's gruesome Pecksniffian pedagogy gets a taste of its own blade soon." That's right… it's got Pecksniffian pedagogy. There's a vaccine for that, right?

Top VDS Downloads

MOVIES

- *Paranormal Activity*
- *District 9*
- *The Hangover* (Unrated)
- *Inglourious Basterds*
- *Jennifer's Body* (Unrated)

TV SHOWS

- *Family Guy: Season Something, Something, Something Dark Side*
- *Naruto Shippuden Uncut: Season Vol. 1*
- *Family Guy: Season 8*
- *South Park Uncensored: Season 13*
- *Robot Chicken: Episode 3*

↑ Megan Fox *isn't* the number one download?! What is wrong with you people?

TOP 25 TITLES GAME PLAN Insights

2010 Software Tracking Charts[1]

Capitalizing on the Momentum

Nick Williams | OTX Director, Gaming Insights

WITH TWO OF THE TOP THREE TITLES IN THE TOP 25, THE PS3 APPEARS TO BE CAPITALIZING ON THE MOMENTUM FROM THE RECENT PRICE DROP AND A SUCCESSFUL HOLIDAY SEASON.

God of War III is undoubtedly one of the premier 2010 releases for Sony, and should help to boost hardware sales during the month of launch. In fact, the latest data from OTX's GamePlan Insights shows that 30% of those who plan to purchase God of War III do not yet own a PS3.

RPG gamers in the US will get their Final Fantasy fix this year with the launch of Final Fantasy XIII, ranked third on the PS3 and tenth on the Xbox 360. While consumer demand for most 2010 multi-platform releases are fairly evenly matched (Batman: Arkham Asylum 2, Super Street Fighter IV, Medal of Honor), purchase intent for the PS3 version of FFXIII is significantly higher than its Xbox 360 counterpart. This data confirms that the Final Fantasy franchise continues to resonate with PlayStation loyalists, and despite the loss of console exclusivity, it remains a Sony brand at heart.

PI Rank	Game Title	Platform	Publisher	Awareness Index	Purchase Intent Index	Recession Proof Index [2]	Release Date
1	God of War III	PS3	SCEA	225	493	447	Apr 01.10
2	Halo: Reach	X360	Microsoft	213	450	592	Q3 2010
3	Final Fantasy XIII	PS3	Square Enix	248	445	755	Mar 09.10
4	Gears of War 3	X360	Microsoft	193	436	372	TBA 2010
5	Super Mario Galaxy 2	Wii	Nintendo	202	432	804	TBA 2010
6	The Legend of Zelda 2	Wii	Nintendo	207	343	567	TBA 2010
7	Gran Turismo 5	PS3	SCEA	212	319	267	TBA 2010
8	Pokemon SoulSilver Version	DS	Nintendo	149	301	365	Mar 14.10
9	Fable III	X360	Microsoft	143	294	277	TBA 2010
10	Final Fantasy XIII	X360	Square Enix	248	291	398	Mar 09.10
11	Pokemon HeartGold Version	DS	Nintendo	146	260	268	Mar 14.10
12	Dead Rising 2	X360	Capcom	132	242	122	TBA 2010
13	Left 4 Dead 2: The Passing	X360	Electronic Arts	129	233	243	Q2 2010
14	StarCraft II	PC	Blizzard	131	226	666	TBA 2010
15	Batman: Arkham Asylum 2	X360	WB Interactive	129	188	204	TBA 2010
16	Star Wars: The Force Unleased 2	X360	LucasArts	163	174	106	TBA 2010
17	Super Street Fighter IV	X360	Capcom	166	172	137	Apr 06.10
18	Super Street Fighter IV	PS3	Capcom	166	163	81	Apr 06.10
19[T]	Star Wars: The Old Republic	PC	LucasArts	154	154	131	TBA 2010
19[T]	Batman: Arkham Asylum 2	PS3	WB Interactive	129	154	163	TBA 2010
21	Battlefield: Bad Company 2	X360	Electronic Arts	106	151	106	Mar 02.10
22[T]	Medal of Honor (2010)	X360	Electronic Arts	155	149	146	TBA 2010
22[T]	Fallout: New Vegas	X360	Bethesda	81	149	122	TBA 2010
24	Max Payne 3	X360	Rockstar	136	142	89	TBA 2010
25	Medal of Honor (2010)	PS3	Electronic Arts	155	141	130	TBA 2010

OTX's GamePlan Insights Weekly Syndicated Tracking Study:
1,000 U.S. gamers and game buyers are surveyed each week including hardcore gamers, casual gamers and everyone in between. The study tracks up to 600 game SKUs at any given time, including all major console, handheld, PC, and iPhone titles. For more information, visit www.gameplaninsights.com.

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[1] Data Date Range: December 20, 2009 to January 2, 2010 (sample size - 2,000)
All OTX metrics are indexed against titles releasing on/after March 1, 2010. Index value of 100 is average.

[2] Recession-Proof Index is based on the number of times a title is selected as First, Second, or Third purchase choice.

By OTX

Letters Feedback, Insight, Deep Thoughts, and Et Cetera

"Seriously, what dumba$$ designed the controls?"

▲ This month's conversation starter

SHIFTY FEATURES

I'm a new convert from the 360 and have been playing *Need for Speed SHIFT.* While I love the game and how it plays, I cannot understand why the devs did not include a button to cycle to the next song. I just spent 48 minutes starting the race, quitting, and starting again to try to get my favorite song (so few good ones in the game.../rage) to play at the beginning of the race to no avail. I heard several of the songs played multiple times, which was quite infuriating—with two unassigned buttons there is no excuse for this.

One other thing that is quite irritating (at least with my control setup—using one analog stick for acceleration and one for steering) is when I accidentally press the right stick down a little too hard and the stupid EA messenger pops up during the middle of a race. Another unassigned button would be great for this function since its out of the way. Seriously, what dumba$$ designed the controls?

The last thing is probably the most serious and felt by many other players: when you're on a straightaway and an "X" event (aka being "motivated" off the track) occurs, there is no reason to not count the lap time/enforce a speed limit, since you would have only added time as compared to having stayed on the track. Sure it would take more work to program this distinction, but I'm pretty sure that's what the devs get paid for.

Random thoughts: An in-lobby chat for people without mics would be nice. More detailed restrictions for online games like: no supercars, but with works still available. And I hate leaving a lobby for "X" reason (usually car restrictions), then rejoining the exact same lobby over and over. Why not make it so that you don't rejoin the same lobby if you leave? The game is pretty good, but could be great with a bit more polishing.

True-Saber, via email

See, people? This is the kind of expert hands-on reader feedback that gives us nerdgasms. It gives us an oppor-tunity to compare notes with our own experience and to relay concrete observations and impressions on to developers. Great job, True-Saber.

Send your comments to PTOM_Letters@futureus.com. And make 'em good, or at least funny, because we're getting picky about giving out prizes.

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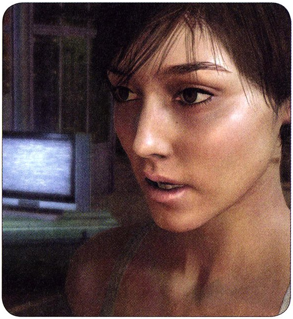


LETTER OF THE MONTH

HEAVY, MAN. REALLY HEAVY.

I read your preview for *Heavy Rain* [January 2010 issue, p.44] and I think the part I like most is the fact that if your character dies, he/she is gone for good. For the rest of the game. They're never coming back, ever. I love there being consequences for your actions, because that just seems right.

I spent last weekend playing *Fallout 3* and then read a FAQ about playing on the Very Hard difficulty setting and it seemed too…heartless. When I play *Fallout* it's an extension of my life, I act in the game how I would act in real life. I never blew up Megaton for the fun of it—there are a lot of people there. I didn't let the Ghouls kill everyone in Tenpenny Tower—they might not deserve it, but they're still innocent until proven guilty. I did become a Regulator as soon as possible because

UNCLASSIFIED ↗

I am a Public Affairs photographer currently stationed in Iraq and about five months ago I decided to set up a shot of a soldier being engulfed in a cloud of dust. I did not intend it to look like a *Call of Duty* cover, but the result is very similar. Being the videogame dork that I am I thought it was very cool and I thought the PTOM staff would enjoy it as well.

Sgt. Travis Zielinski, via email

Simply awesome. Keep safe and come home soon, soldier.

TALK TO EACH OTHER, PEOPLE!

I think *MAG* looks promising, but some people are going to ruin the game's multiplayer by lack of communication. I've been playing *Modern Warfare 2* since launch day and 65 percent of the time the team I'm on loses because countless people play without a headset. I really don't see the point of playing an online game if people aren't going to talk to each other in a game that requires teamwork. Online games require communication and by not using or having a headset, you're ruining the play experience of others.

Tony, via email

Affirmative, Tony. Copy that. Even if you're shy and don't want to chime in during battles, wear a headset so you can follow our commands, dammit!

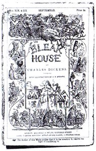
IN-CETERATED

What is this? Roger (obviously someone of some import at your publication) reads a book from 1996. [January 2010 issue, p.21] Will Roger (an obvious alias/pseudonym) next tell us he has discovered the joys of taco-burgers and/or taco-dogs while reading "The Forgotten Art of Pickling Your Own Veggies?"

Have I missed something here? Is old now good? Has the magazine's editorial policy been reversed?

Roger (name changed to protect the innocent), if you enjoy old epic novels, Charles Dickens' (1812-1870) *Bleak House* is the first of his panoramic (epic) stories. The Et Cetera book report is due in February—a Cliffs Notes synopsis is not acceptable.

Scott Salyers, Belin [sic], NM



Well, as astute (and filled with haughty asides) as your letter may be, we're only printing it because we need a scapegoat. That's right everyone, we no longer have an Et Cetera column because Scott Salyers didn't like it! Prepare to be deluged, Scott, by the rancor of legions of Et Cetera fans (or not). And you misspelled your hometown, smart guy.

TOO LATE

I really like your Et Cetera section. I find good stuff in there every month.

Seth Heiserman, via email

Tell it to Salyers. It's out of our hands.

READING IS FUNDAMENTAL

I would just like to thank you for printing in your November issue that the new PS3 slim was backwards compatible. Well, it is not. I know I really should have read the box, but when you trust a mag, sometimes you forget. I really can't believe that you got that wrong. Now I just dropped $300 to go wait in line to return the thing. Thank you for teaching me this valuable lesson. Next time I will read the box, or I will not read your mag. I haven't made up my mind yet.

Susi, via email

Assuming you haven't burned your November issue, please turn to page 8. You might notice that PS2 backwards compatibility is listed as a PRUNED feature. Pruned as in "cut or removed." We look forward to your apology.

EXPERT OPINION

I work part-time at a popular brick-and-mortar games retailer and keep hearing employees tell customers the following: "Yes, the PS3 can play Blu-ray movies, but we don't recommend doing that because it wears out the laser faster."

Michael Bella, via email

Precisely why we avoid using flashlights—we don't want to deplete the sun's energy.

NO, REALLY, GET NEW FRIENDS

So about three month's ago I gladly bought a PS3. I've already bought games like *Resident Evil 5* and *Metal Gear Solid 4.* But at school, I'm the only one who likes PS3. My friends have 360s and tell me that the PS3 sucks, but never say why. They do this every day. What should I do? Should I go into complete rage right in front of them or do something else?

Jose, Salt Lake City, UT

I'm killing the bad guys anyway, so why not get paid for it?

I remember hearing that there was this 17-year-old kid that murdered a taxi driver because he was imitating *Grand Theft Auto* gameplay. I think I know why: *GTA* lacks any consequence because that person you just ran over never had a name, never made an impact on gameplay whatsoever, and you don't really get punished for killing him.

With the release of *Heavy Rain* it seems like people will have to stop just playing a game and really put thought into what they're doing. Maybe if we're punished for poor choices in games, we'll better understand the consequences of our actions in real life.

Peter DeMaat, Logansport, IN

Very introspective, Peter. While there's something to be said for doing things that you can't in real-life—and knowing the difference between fantasy and reality—we agree that game-affecting consequences add satisfying layers of depth and complexity to the experience. You're our Letter of the Month for reminding us that games can, and should, be about more than just headshots and explosions.

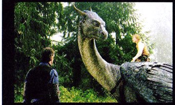
LOTM scribe Peter wins an Air Hogs SwitchBlade R/C stunt flier courtesy of Spin Master (www.spinmaster.com).

Original Dragons

Our January issue (and final) Reviews Intro page contest was a salute to *Dragon Age: Origins.* Terry Edwards correctly identified the three dragon-related movies—from smokin' hot to crash and burn.

"The first photo is from the best movie of the bunch, 1981's *Dragonslayer.* The dragon is called Vermithrax Pejoractive. It was a great movie using go-motion that came out quite a while before CGI. It's really crazy that the animation is so great.

"The middle one is a dragon from 2002's *Reign of Fire.* A mediocre to okay movie, it had amazing design but was panned for the bad acting and script. Those dragons had long necks!

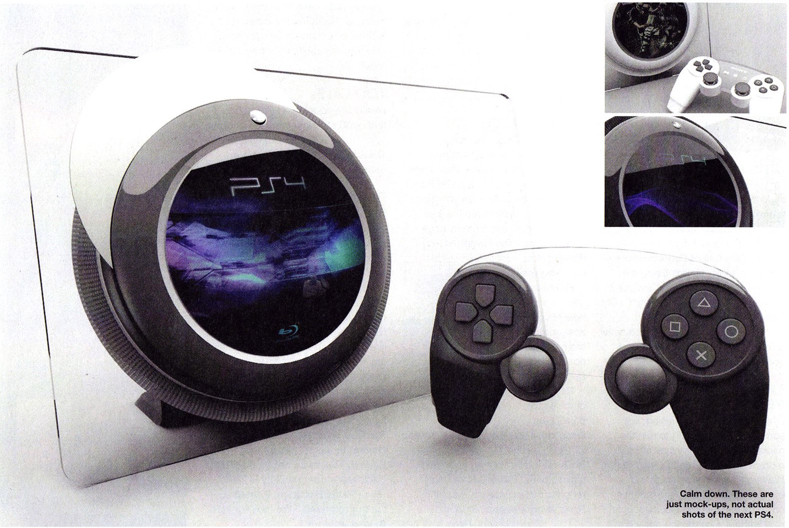


The worst example of a book-movie ever. The dragon is Saphira from 2006's *Eragon.* The movie changed the book's storyline so much that there's no chance for a sequel, but the book series is still quite epic. And we thought only game-movie translations were bad."

Gran Update

In our February 2010 cover story on *Gran Turismo 5,* we incorrectly stated that Indy (IRL) racing cars and tracks would appear in the game. While the Indianapolis Motor Speedway will indeed appear in *GT5,* Indy cars currently will not. (But we can always hope for DLC!)

From the Community



Calm down. These are just mock-ups, not actual shots of the next PS4.

Flights of Fantasy

One man's vision of the PS4 and PSP2

Behold the future! Or at least what we hope the future will look like. Yes, unfortunately these stunning PlayStation 4 and PSP2 designs are, as of now, only mock-ups that Sony fan and gifted freelance designer Tai Chiem whipped up just for kicks. "[I wanted] to challenge myself to design something based on a current company while keeping their design language, but also taking it further," Chiem tells us. "I wanted it to look like something Sony would design."

The real question is, could these future-chic plans ever become a reality? Chiem certainly thinks so. "Flexible touchscreen technology is currently being developed, so it's definitely possible," he says. "I have seen companies such as Samsung developing transparent screens. While it's cost prohibitive to have these features at the moment, I think it would be feasible in the next five to 10 years." For now, you'll just have to check out Chiem's online portfolio at Tinyurl.com/TaiChiem for more design goodness.

This PSP2 design is...unusual, but the phrase "flexible touchscreen technology" sets our hearts aflutter.

Tech Support

This month's top technical queries

CAN I TAKE MY SAVES/PROFILE OVER TO A FRIEND'S HOUSE TO USE ON HIS PS3?

Some games will let you take your saves to your buddy's house by copying them over to a memory card (USB or otherwise), but others won't let you load them up unless you're signed in under the original profile. Unfortunately, it just depends on the game.

I SWITCHED FROM COMPONENT CABLES TO AN HDMI CABLE (OR VICE VERSA), AND NOW MY SYSTEM DOESN'T WORK. WHAT'S THE DEAL?

Your system *should* automatically detect a new output method and prompt you to adjust your system settings. If it doesn't and you just get a blank screen and no sound, try resetting your system (when turning your system on, press and hold the power button until you hear a beep). This will restore the default settings and let you select the proper audio/visual output.

THE
MOST FUN
YOU CAN
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YOUR HANDS
WITHOUT
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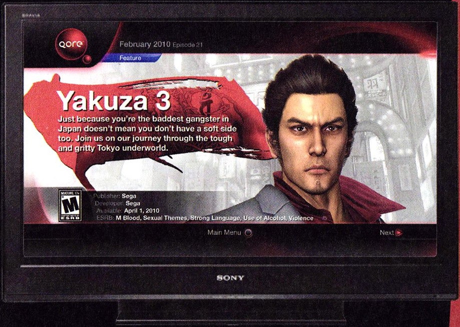
Presented by the PlayStation Network

Qore host Veronica Belmont

QORE EPISODE 21

Featuring Yakuza 3, Battlefield: Bad Company 2, Lost Planet 2, and 2010 Best Bets



Yakuza 3

Just because you're the baddest gangster in Japan doesn't mean you don't have a soft side too. Join us on our journey through the tough and gritty Tokyo underworld.

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega
Available: April 1, 2010
ESRB: M Blood, Sexual Themes, Strong Language, Use of Alcohol, Violence

Valentine's Day is upon us and love is in the air, which makes it the perfect time to snuggle up with your sexy PS3! Whether you're playing co-op games with your significant other, basking in the glow of the hottest Blu-ray movies, or spending some naughty time with your favorite little RPG, we hope you'll be feeling all fuzzy inside this month because nobody loves you more than we do.

Qore is available for purchase from the PlayStation Network for $2.99 an episode, or $24.99 for a 13-episode subscription. Subscribers have access to Betas, demos, themes, and additional downloadable content each month.

AVAILABLE NOW!

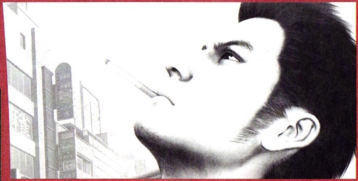
Download on the PlayStation™ Network.

FEATURING

Tokyo Tough

In Japan, the word yakuza conjures up fear and dread. But here? It fills us with giddy delight! That's all thanks to *Yakuza 3*, which puts you in the role of a butt-kicking Tokyo gangster who just happens to have a soft spot for orphans.

After getting your hands dirty in the virtual streets of Tokyo, join us as we scour the real-life avenues and alleyways to bring you some of the weird, wild, and just straight-up bizarre awesomeness from Tokyo's Akihabara district.



In good company with *Bad Company 2*

In the marketplace of first-person shooters, only the strong survive. We're diving in the trenches with *Battlefield: Bad Company 2* developer DICE to find out how they're planning on making a truly standout military shooter.

Lost and Found

After the frosty reception the nasty Akrid gave us in the original *Lost Planet,* you could say Capcom has turned up the heat a bit! In *Lost Planet 2* the ice has melted and the bugs are back! Come dive into our disgusting and thorough in-depth preview.

10x10

And now that the 2010 dust has finally settled, we collectively realized that it's officially "the future"! With the help of our friends at *PlayStation: The Official Magazine,* we're bringing you 10 hot new things to be excited about in 2010!

Photograph by Mark Madeo

Bring the Stars into Alignment!

Sakura Wars™

~ So Long, My Love ~

"Most wanted RPG from RPGamer!"
- RPGamer.com

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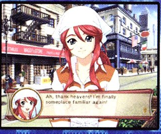
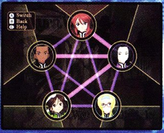
art book!!

Available March 2010
www.sakurawars.us



Ah, thank heavens! I'm finally someplace familiar again!



Sakura Wars
~So Long, My Love~
Unforgettable Memories

Notice: Final product is subject to change.

TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Fantasy Violence
Language
Sexual Themes

PS2
PlayStation 2

Wii™

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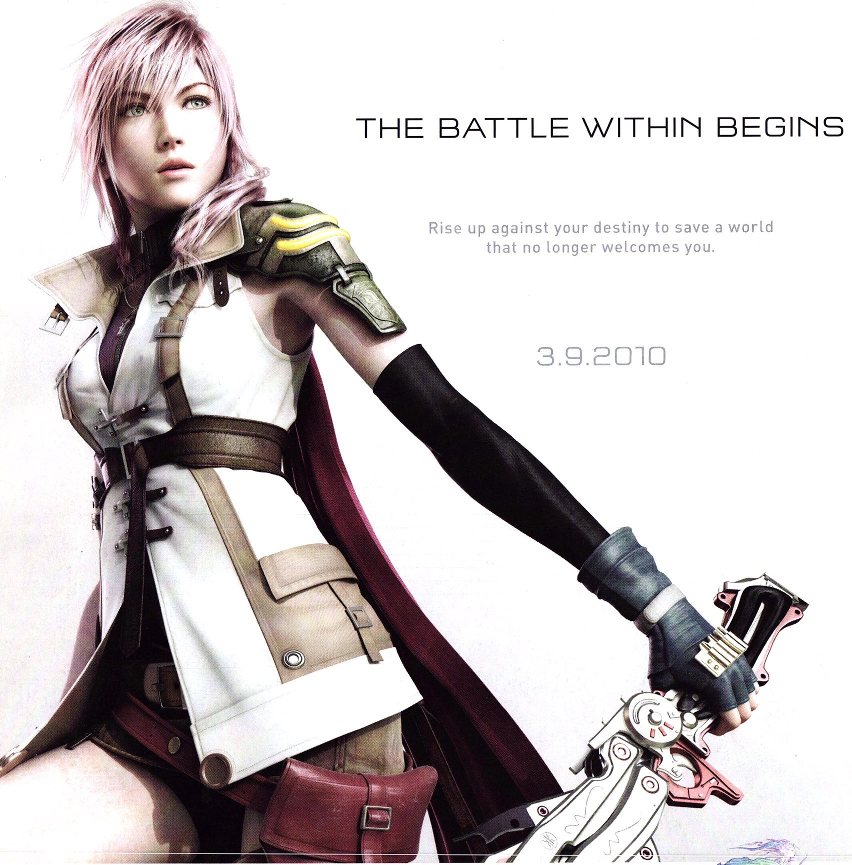

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Mild Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

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